

Theology vol 8.
L E T T E R

TO THE
RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP
OF

LITCHFIELD AND COVENTRY;

WHEREIN THE IMPORTANCE

OF THE

PROPHECIES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT,

AND THE NATURE

OF THE

GRAND APOSTACY PREDICTED IN THEM,

ARE PARTICULARLY AND IMPARTIALLY CONSIDERED.

BY EDWARD EVANSON. A.M. *K*

As ye have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are
there many Antichrists. 1 JOHN, ii. 18.

Au renouvellement des lettres, comme on commença a fen-
tir les abus & les dérèglemens ou l'on étoit tombé, tout le
monde cherchant un remède au mal, des gens hardis —
déchirerent l'église, au lieu de la réformer.

MONTESQUIEU, G. & D. des R. ch. 22.

L O N D O N :

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Reader is requested to alter an inaccuracy of expression, in page 85, lines 10 and 11, which was not properly adverted to, till the sheet had passed the press, viz. *for the words* "are not to be found in any of the oldest," *to read* "were not found in any of the earliest and best." He is desired also to pardon and correct some manifest faults in the punctuation, together with a few literal errors of the press, which, it is apprehended, are too obvious to need to be pointed out, and of too little consequence to occasion any obscurity in the meaning of the Author.



A L E T

A LETTER, &c.

MY LORD,

THE controversy which hath of late years been so much and warmly agitated, respecting the fundamental articles of the Theological System, at present received as Orthodox, and by law established in this kingdom; whether I consider it as a Christian, a citizen, or a member of the church of England, appears to me to be of the most serious nature, and of the highest importance to society.

If the subject of debate be properly stated, I think it may be fairly reduced to the two following points: Whether to assert, *that the Supreme Creator of all things, hath in these later ages of our world, been made one of his own creatures,* be, or be not blaspheming the eternal Deity? And whether, *the worshipping the Supreme God, as having the body, parts, and passions of a created being,* (to say nothing of its absolute inconsistency with the doctrine of the first religious ar-

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ticle of our own church) be, or be not the most criminal species of idolatry; the very sin established among the Israelites by their king Jeroboam, on account of which the Divine Providence is repeatedly declared to have so early accomplished the destruction of that kingdom, and the dispersion of the ten tribes?

Surely, my Lord, prejudice apart, there can be nothing in these questions, which a man of plain understanding and common-sense abilities, is not thoroughly qualified to determine. For, to suppose, that after the best researches of candid, conscientious, and reflecting men, revealed religion affords some of them just cause to think, that the belief, or rather the profession of belief of any particular doctrine is requisite to salvation; whilst it is calculated to convince others, that the self-same doctrine is really blasphemous, were grossly to affront its divine Author; in fact, denying him that unbounded wisdom and goodness, which are attributes essentially necessary to his existence. When therefore we see men, justly deserving that character, obstinately adhere to opposite conclusions, deduced on both sides from the sacred Scriptures, we may be assured, there is some deception in the case: that the true nature of the question is not apprehended by both the
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parties, and that one of them argues from erroneous premises.

To endeavour to bring the main object of this religious controversy into one common obvious point of view, and extricate it from that obscurity, in which superstition and sophistry have too long involved it, (however unequal I may prove to the undertaking) is the purpose of these pages. And I address them, in this public manner to your Lordship, amongst some other, for the following reasons.

That general unbelief of revealed religion amongst the higher orders of our countrymen, which, however your Lordship and I might differ in our manner of accounting for it, is too notorious for either of us to doubt of, hath, by a necessary consequence, produced in the majority of our present legislators, an absolute indifference towards religious questions of every kind. They regard religion merely in a political light; and instead of thinking every individual concerned and interested in articles of theology, consider them as the business of Ecclesiastics only, as forming a particular department of the state. They are therefore no more inclined to hearken to remonstrances, suggested by the conscientious scruples of any of the inferior Clergy, whilst the Bishops, Deans,

and Archdeacons continue to approve the doctrines remonstrated against, than they would be to attend to the complaints of a few subalterns in the army or navy, upon a point, which all the superior officers should pronounce essentially necessary to the service.

From these circumstances there seems too much reason to apprehend, that no proposal for the revival and amendment of our theology and mode of public worship will be attended to by Parliament, unless it originates from, or, at least, is supported by that Right Reverend Bench, of which your Lordship is one of the most distinguished ornaments. I must add, that should such a proposal ever proceed from your Lordships, the very indifference above mentioned would secure it an easy passage through both Houses, as a mere official business. It greatly behoves your Lordships, therefore, to be well assured, that every thing in our religious establishment is right in the sight of God; for should it prove otherwise, the guilt of preventing the necessary reformation must rest chiefly upon your Lordships.

Considerations of this kind naturally turned my attention upon this occasion, towards the members of your sacred Order; and the sincere esteem, which I very early contracted for your
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Lordship's elegant manners and amiable disposition, together with a veneration of your great learning and eminent abilities, soon fixed it upon your Lordship.

Besides, after your Lordship's public discourses upon the subject of our Articles, in Lincoln's-Inn chapel, and your well-attested patronage and commendation of Mr. Burgh's defence of Athanasianism, your Lordship must be regarded as one of the avowed, as well as ablest, champions of the established theology. Your Lordship, also, is well known to have made the prophecies of the New Testament your particular study : and they are most intimately connected with the subject of the present debate.

In cases of gross absurdity of every kind, our own reason, if fairly exerted, is abundantly able to convince us what is wrong. But, in theological questions, to discover what is right, a certain degree of knowledge of every part of the sacred writings is, without doubt, indispensibly necessary. And though many, both of the Laity and Clergy, who are very little, if at all, acquainted with the meaning of the *prophetic* parts of the Holy Scriptures, are ready to decide as peremptorily in favour of what is called Orthodoxy, as the uninformed young gentleman

tleman just now named ; yet I am bold to affirm, that no man can be a competent judge of the main point in this question, unless he hath a clear conception of their general scope and meaning, so far as they have been already fulfilled ; and is able to give, at least, a rational, consistent explanation of the nature of that universal apostacy and fundamental corruption of our Holy Religion, which is the grand object of almost all the prophecies of the Gospel.

Indeed, without this qualification, I do not see, upon what firm grounds any Minister of our Religion can satisfy, either himself or others, of the intent, or even of the divine authority of those Scriptures which he professeth to teach. He will not, surely, lay any great stress upon the opinions or testimony of that chain of writers, generally termed Orthodox, which extends through the six or seven centuries nearest to the age of the Apostles ; for unfortunately all the grossest corruptions of Christianity have descended regularly, though gradually through the very same line. In the fourth and succeeding centuries of the Christian æra, your Lordship well knows, the state of the Church was egregiously corrupt and superstitious. And the method then prevalent of determining truth by a plurality of voices, and
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enforcing their decisions by the arm of the civil magistrate, leaves but little room for an impartial mind to rest itself upon any evidence produced from the writers of those ages. And with respect to that which arises from the writers of the second century, which is of all by far the most important, it is attended with two very suspicious circumstances. The first is, the zealous care wherewith their orthodox successors have destroyed the works of all the authors of that early age, who differed from them, under the common name of Heretics. The other, that under that general ignominious appellation, have perished the works of all those writers (and doubtless they were many) who had either been educated Christians from their infancy, or had been converted from the religion of the Jews, and who flourished before the middle of the century: and that the only men, even of the latter half of that period, whose writings have been permitted to come down to us, were, mostly, if not all, converts from Paganism, and had all of them been trained up in the schools of the later Platonists, or other philosophic sects. Besides which, one can scarce read two pages of any remaining work, either of the second or third century, without meeting with such palpable instances of the most credulous

superstition of the author as tend greatly to invalidate the force of any evidence he can give us. But if human testimony, in this case, is so defective, it is also unnecessary: and, as in St. Paul's days, so in ours, the faith of every rational disciple of Jesus Christ standeth not in the wisdom or veracity of men, but in the power of God*.

To an inquisitive, reflecting mind, which must have something more solid to rest its convictions upon than a mere scholastic display of words, it soon appears, that in order to convince mankind of the truth and certainty of any supernatural revelation of the divine Will, the evidence also by which it is attested must be of a supernatural kind. At the first promulgation of such a revelation, immediate miracles are the only supernatural tokens of divine authority, whereby it can be attested. And notwithstanding all the objections that sophistry hath laboured to raise against them, they may, undoubtedly, be so numerous, and of such a sort, as fully to satisfy every candid, unprejudiced beholder, that they are, indeed, produced by the signal interposition of that all-controlling Being, who alone can be supposed capable of over-ruling the general course of nature, which he only hath

* 1 Cor. ii 5.

established. The full force, however, of this kind of preternatural evidence operates only upon the eye-witnesses of the miraculous facts. To succeeding generations its weight is continually decreasing, in proportion to the length of time elapsed from the wonder-working period. And with respect to the miracles wrought at the first preaching of the Christian covenant, being recorded only in those books, which announce to us the divine authority of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; the certainty of their having been performed must depend entirely upon the veracity of the books, in which their history is contained: they cannot, therefore, now be admitted in evidence of the veracity of those writings, of which they themselves make a very considerable part. The accomplishment of predicted events is then the only permanent; and to us the only satisfactory evidence of the divine origin of the Religion we profess: And so necessary a *testimony* in behalf of every revelation is *the spirit of prophecy*, that we are warranted by the word of God himself, in rejecting every religious doctrine, which is not ratified by the visible impression of this heavenly seal. “ If thou say in
 “ thine heart, (saith God by his servant Moses*)
 “ how shall we know the word, which the Lord

* Deut. xviii. 21, &c.

“ hath not spoken? When a Prophet speak-
 “ eth in the name of the Lord, if the thing
 “ follow not, nor come to pass, that is the
 “ thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but
 “ the Prophet hath spoken it presumptuously :
 “ thou shalt not be afraid of him.”

The great weight of this kind of supernatural evidence of the authority of revealed Religion, as your Lordship hath very judiciously observed †, depends not merely upon the completion of any two or three particular predictions taken singly, which might, perhaps, be deemed fortuitous, but upon the accomplishment of that general course of great events decreed to take place at various and distant periods, through all the ages of the world ; and foretold, in that extensive, well-compact chain of prophecies, which pervades and connects together all those sacred writings that contain the essential doctrines of revelation, for the very purpose of bearing, at all times, the most convincing testimony to the divine authority, both of the Law and the Gospel. It is obvious, therefore, that the more numerous the links are, of which this chain is composed, and the greater distance there is between the time of the prediction and that of the corresponding event, the more satisfactory and

† Introd. to the Study of the Proph. Sermon. 4.

indisputable is the proof arising from it. So that the strength of that evidence, which is derived from prophecy, is continually increasing in the very same proportion, in which that deduced from miracles decreases. When * *the mystery of God shall be finished*, in the full and final accomplishment of the whole series of predictions, the entire force of this supernatural evidence in favour of divine revelation will, without doubt, universally appear complete and irresistibly convincing. In the mean time, since it is much greater to us than it can have been to any preceding age; since it affords the only rational and solid grounds, on which we can erect the edifice of our own religious faith, and the only arguments, by which we can reasonably hope to convert the unbelieving world; the greatest service that can be done the cause of true Christianity, seems to be to turn the public attention to the prophecies of sacred writ, and to those particularly, wherein the professors of the Christian faith are clearly and in an especial manner concerned. For this reason, I consider the lectures founded by your Right Reverend and profoundly learned friend, of which your Lordship hath favoured the public with the first course, as the most important

* Rev. x, 7.

institution of the kind that hath ever taken place amongst us. Yet, at the same time, my Lord, I cannot forbear lamenting the unworthy narrowness of its main view, which, so far as I can judge from the deed of trust, and from the tenor of your Lordship's elegant and ingenious discourses, is confined merely to the object of proving the church of papal Rome to be the apostate, antichristian Church, predicted by the prophets, both of the Old Testament and the New.

During the feeble, infant state of Protestantism, its abettors did very right to adopt every justifiable method of defence against the hostile attacks of the Roman Catholics. And it was then natural, it was necessary, to point out to the world those prophetic signatures, which so strongly characterize papal Rome, and to exclaim, that the Pope was Antichrist. But now, in these days of security, as well as establishment, it were surely a more liberal way of studying the Prophecies, to aim at discovering what their real meaning is, than to predetermine them to one particular sense. And it would undoubtedly be far more useful to us, and much more becoming us as Christians, to examine whether we ourselves are right, rather than

amuse ourselves with discovering what other churches are wrong.

There is the greater reason for this change in our mode of studying these most important parts of the Holy Scriptures, because in common justice to the Papists, it must be acknowledged, that the corruptions of the Christian Church, though they were perhaps completed, were not begun under the ecclesiastical tyranny of the Bishops of Rome; nor did their usurpation continue universal, even over the regions of the Western empire, during the period of 1260 years, a circumstance absolutely requisite to the completion of St. John's prophecy. In short, my Lord, it is abundantly evident, that the characters of the predicted Apostacy, should be sought for in the doctrines of a Church, not in the local situation of its primate. And though St. John calls the complicated human power, by which the genuine doctrines of the Gospel were to be perverted and depraved, by the title of *Antichrist* *, yet we must remember, that, in the same passage, he plainly intimates, that in his sense of the expression there may, at the same time, be *many Antichrists*. And after all the stress, which your Lordship and other commentators have thought fit to lay upon the cir-

* 1 John, i. 18.

cumstance of *the seven-hilled City*, as descriptive of the peculiar residence of *Antichrist*, there still appears to me sufficient reason to believe, that in the prophetic vision of St. John, that emblematic term is never once used to denote the Hierarchy of the city of Rome.

The contrary opinion of most Protestant commentators seems to have arisen from their confounding, under the common name of *Antichrist*, the several objects of the different prophecies of Daniel, Paul and John, concerning the apostacy of the Christian Church, and even of different parts of the same prophecy; and instead of explaining each of them singly and regularly, and making only an impartial use of that light, which they mutually reflect upon each other, deducing from them indiscriminately the notes of the Apostate Church, as if the scope and meaning of all, and even of every part of them were precisely the same. Thus your Lordship, in your learned and ingenious lectures, taking it for granted, that *the little horn* of Daniel's fourth beast, *the man of sin* of St. Paul, and (what to me seems indeed extraordinary) both *the seven-headed beast full of names of blasphemy*, and *the woman* riding upon that same seven-headed beast, as also *the beast in appearance a lamb, but in speech a dragon*, and *the false*

false prophet of St. John's Revelation, are all of them only different denominations of the Hierarchy of the Apostate Church, endeavours to fix the charge of Antichristian Apostacy upon the Bishop and Church of Rome, by arguments deduced sometimes from one of those prophecies, sometimes from another, but without the uniform application of any one of them to the supposed object of the prediction.

The reason of this conduct, which is very far from being peculiar to your Lordship, is sufficiently obvious. For could it once be proved, that the spiritual sovereignty of the Roman Pontiff is the sole, *exclusive* * object of all those prophecies, it would follow, that no Church, which disallowed that sovereignty, and renounced the communion of the Church of Rome, could be at all concerned in her guilt: and consequently the several Protestant Churches, which, rejecting the pretended supremacy of Rome, have erected separate Hierarchies of their own, must be allowed to stand perfectly clear of the heinous crimes of the predicted Apostacy, and to be indeed, what they all call themselves, the *reformed* Churches of Christ. But the misfortune is, that this favourite *exclusive* application of the characters of Antichrist

* Serm. XII, p. 426, ed. r.

to the Church of Rome, is so far from being warranted by the plain meaning of the prophecies themselves, that, in those of the New Testament, there are some circumstances which cannot in any sense be applied to her, as distinguished from other Churches: and scarce any (I believe I might say none) which are in reality more peculiarly applicable to the Roman, than to all the established Churches in Europe: I fear it is too great an honour for me to expect; but I cannot forbear requesting your Lordship to favour me with your attention to a cursory review of the great leading characters of the several predictions upon this subject, considering those of each Prophet separately, and in the order in which our Canon hath placed them.

With respect to Daniel, my Lord, it must be remarked, that if we except the celebrated prediction of the seventy weeks, the *avowed* objects of all his prophecies are the great revolutions of civil government under the four universal monarchies of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. It is therefore reasonable to conclude, that no circumstances are introduced by the prophet, but such as coincide, or are necessarily connected with the main scope of his predictions. Now since the ten horns of his fourth
visionary

visionary beast * are declared to be emblems of the many separate kingdoms, into which this prophet, so many ages before the event, repeatedly foretold the European, Roman Empire would be divided, it will readily be granted, that *the little horn* † representing a temporal principality arising upon the ruins of some of the various governments, into which the body of the Empire was at first broken, differing from the other kingdoms of the West, and though *little*, that is, inferior to the other principalities in power, yet assuming a tone and deportment more arrogant than any of them, blaspheming ‡ the Deity, and persecuting conscientious Christians, is a very just and exact type of the Roman hierarchy, and applicable to no other hierarchy upon earth, because none other ever acquired to itself an independent civil dominion. But then it is to be observed, that the Church of Rome, as described in this prophecy, within the limits of its own temporal jurisdiction, that is, as far as its local situation is concerned, is itself one of the disjointed members of the old Roman empire, an horn of the emblematic beast described both in this vision and in the revelation of St. John. It cannot therefore, in respect of its local situation,

* Dan. c. 7. † Ibid. v. 8, 20—24. ‡ Ibid. v. 25.

be considered, much less *exclusively* considered as the antitype of the woman represented by the Apostle riding upon that very beast, that is, supported by all the European princes, of whom the Roman hierarch is one. Nor can the exaltation of the Bishop of Rome to the throne of civil power, which is clearly one of the chief subjects of this prophecy, any otherwise assist us in determining the æra of that universal apostacy from the true religion of the Gospel, predicted by the Prophets of the new Covenant, than as it affords us a very convincing proof of its having taken place previously to that event; because without a long and general *falling away* both of pastors and people from the spirit and principles of Christianity, ecclesiastical ambition could never have aimed at, much less have attained so high a pinnacle of worldly greatness.

Let us then, my Lord, turn over to the Prophets of the New Testament; and in the next place, consider those previous notices of this unhappy exchange of the religion of the Gospel for Antichristian superstition, which we find given by St. Paul to the first converts to Christianity. The chief of these is the well-known prophecy, in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, concerning *the man of sin* *, who, when the obstacle,

* 2 Thess. c. ii. v. 3—12.

which

which in the Apostle's days, and for some time after, prevented his appearance, should be removed, would oppose and counteract the Divine commands, thereby assuming to himself an authority superior to that of God, exalting himself above the object of our religious worship, seating himself in the temple of God, and behaving as if he were God himself. The secret impiety which would produce this fatal perversion of our religion, the Apostle informs us began to operate even in those early times; and asserts, that it would continue to extend its baneful influence until the manifestation of *the man of sin*, under whom the Apostacy from the truth of the Holy Gospel would be general and lasting, being supported, not only by the exertion of *every* human power, but also with pretended miracles and *lying-wonders*: but that at length this impious tyranny would decline and gradually be consumed by the restoration of the genuine doctrines of Christ's Gospel, here metaphorically called *the breath of his mouth*, and will be finally destroyed at that grand revolution of human affairs, which is so frequently alluded to in the Holy Scriptures, and denominated *the coming of Jesus Christ*. One great cause of this shameful defection, St. Paul plainly intimates * would be

* 2 Thess. c. ii. v. 12.

the pleasure which the bulk of the people would take in such acts of unrighteousness as are encouraged by, at least are consistent with the profession of the Antichristian superstition, in preference to that moral rectitude of life and purity of mind, which is indispensibly requisite in every professor of the true religion of the Gospel, whose sole end is *to save* mankind, that is, to heal them of their vices: and he asserts, that, for this reason, divine Providence would give them up to their own imaginations; let them experience the miserable consequences of their impious folly, and suffer them to be so strongly and ignominiously deluded, as to believe a palpable falsehood.

The name of *the man of sin*, which is made use of in this prophecy, neither your Lordship, nor any other approved Commentator, supposes to signify any one particular man, but merely a human power possessed and actually exerted by a succession of different men. And it is not easy to conceive, how any one should have understood that phrase in a more limited sense, who well considered this prediction, and compared it with the apocalypse of St. John, or even who attended to the obvious meaning of similar expressions in other parts of the same
Apostle's

Apostle's writings. For as *the man of God** evidently means not any particular man, but every sincere and good Christian, in all ages and nations of the world, so *the man of sin* undoubtedly signifies not any one man alone, but every man or number of men, in all ages, and I must add, in all places too (though there, perhaps, your Lordship will not agree with me) whose peculiar station and circumstances shall be found to correspond to the prophetic description here given us.

But your Lordship thinks † that the circumstance of his sitting in the temple or church of God, clearly denotes the power signified by *the man of sin*, to be an ecclesiastical and not a civil power: and that, on this account, the prophecy is applicable solely to the hierarchy of Rome. To warrant this conclusion, however, two things are necessary, which to me appear absolutely impracticable; the one, to demonstrate that no ecclesiastics besides those of Rome have ever tyrannically invaded the religious rights and liberties of conscientious Christians: the other, to shew that no civil power ever usurped such a supreme authority in matters of religion as belongs to God alone, nor ever enacted and enforced upon its subjects any articles of faith and terms of the Christian

* 2 Tim. iii. 17.

† Serm. 11.

Covenant contrary to, or even besides those which the express word of God hath declared to be necessary to salvation. Till these be done, not only the Roman Catholic, but every unprejudiced person will be apt to accuse your Lordship of partiality and a want of your usual candour, in the *exclusive* application of this prophecy to the Pope. For let us suppose, (what I, for my own part, am thoroughly convinced of) that the despotic supremacy, claimed and exercised by the Bishop of Rome, in all religious concerns, certainly brings him within the line of the prophetic description, and constitutes him St. Paul's *man of sin*. When our own eighth Henry, from motives of mere personal resentment, thought fit to transfer that very same supremacy from the person of the Pope to himself, within the limits of his own dominions; when the same *spiritual courts* subsisted, the same ecclesiastical jurisdiction was continued under him, which had been established under the Roman Pontiff; when, in the full spirit of Papal tyranny, he burnt some of his subjects for not renouncing the authority of the Pope, and others for renouncing some of the grossest errors of Popery; had not he also every feature of *the man of sin*? Nay, even in the days of reformation, and the reigns of Protestant princes, when by

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virtue of the very same assumed authority and supreme power in religious affairs, and by the same mode of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, numbers of conscientious persons were imprisoned, fined, tortured, and even burned to death, for not professing, or not conforming to, what they were firmly persuaded was repugnant to the commands of God, were none of the distinguishing marks of this predicted, impious power, to be discerned in our own country? Or shall the same characters be allowed to denote *the man of God* in England, which in Italy serve to point out *the man of sin and son of Perdition*? I do not mean by this method of argument to insinuate any particular accusation against either the civil government or the ecclesiastical polity of our own nation. I know not any one established church, nor any principality in Europe, which is not equally liable to the charge. So early as in the fourth century, when Constantine interposed his imperial power to establish the Creed of the Nicene Fathers, as the true and only standard of the orthodox Faith, to be professed by all his subjects, St. Paul's *man of sin* was clearly manifested. And from that time to the present, every successive power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, single and independent, or both together *in alliance*, which hath in any degree

abridged that liberty in religious matters, where-
 with Christ made all his disciples free ; which
 by means of temporal rewards on one hand, and
 disqualifications, penalties and corporal punish-
 ments on the other, hath established amongst
 the people points of religious discipline or doc-
 trine, that not only were not enjoined upon the
 converts by the first preachers of the Gospel,
 but are contradictory to the first principles, both
 of reason and revelation, and even to the plain
 and positive commands of God ; every such
 power, wheresoever it may be situated, is indis-
 putably the sinful power characterized in this
 celebrated prediction of St. Paul. It hath been
 supposed, indeed (upon no sufficient grounds),
 that the imperial power of old Rome, instead of
 being, at any period, the object of this pro-
 phesy, was the very obstacle here spoken of,
 as preventing the manifestation of the man of
 sin : and that he could not appear before the de-
 struction of the Western Empire. But if your
 Lordship's patience will permit you to favour
 me with your attention to the remarks I have to
 offer upon the correspondent prophetic vision
 of St. John, I persuade myself, we shall find
 abundant reason to conclude, that the obstacle
 hinted at by St. Paul, was the Paganism of the
 Roman emperors, which, so long as it con-
 tinued,

tinted, must, in the very nature of things, prevent the civil power of the empire from being exerted to establish and support any nominally Christian Church; and that, by the abolition of Paganism in the imperial palace, and the conversion of Constantine, to what was then, (though not very justly) called the Religion of Jesus Christ, every impediment to the revelation of *the man of sin* was effectually taken out of the way. It is true, this interpretation makes the civil magistrate the chief cause and supporter of the general confirmed Apostacy from true Christianity. And it appears to me impossible, that it could have been effected by any other means. Even within the precincts of the Holy See, the Romish superstition is maintained solely by the power the Pope possesseth as a civil potentate, not as an ecclesiastic: and within the dominions of other princes, when the authority and influence of the Church of Rome extended farthest, it never did nor could enforce obedience to its decrees and ordinances, but under the protection and by the aid of the civil government in each particular country.

St. Paul tells the Theſſalonians, that the coming of this *man of sin* would be not only with all power, but with signs and lying wonders. And if it be thought right to understand this

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circumstance as descriptive of the appearance of the first man who usurped a spiritual tyranny over the minds of his fellow-creatures, and impiously arrogated to himself the power of ordaining articles of faith and religious doctrine, which are not required of Christians in the Gospel, it is most remarkably applicable to the person of Constantine; for his conversion happened when he was at the head of a powerful army, and was pretended to have been occasioned by the miraculous vision of a crucifix in the clouds, whose celestial inscription promised him victory, upon his adopting the profession signified by that *sign* or emblem. But, from the application which the Protestants uniformly make of this part of the prophecy to the fabulous legends of the Roman Catholics, I conclude, there is something in the turn of expression of the whole sentence taken together, which is thought more adapted to the pastors of the Apostate Church, than to the temporal potentate, by whose power the Apostacy was to be established. And, even in this sense, your Lordship well knows the prophecy will apply as strongly to the ecclesiastics of the fourth century, as to those of the Church of Rome. The pretended miracles of that period are very numerous, though there cannot be a more evident truth, than that the
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miraculous powers conferred upon the first disciples, must necessarily have ceased in the Christian Church at the extinction of that generation, which had received them by the imposition of the Apostle's hands; because none but the Apostles ever possessed the extraordinary privilege of communicating supernatural gifts to others. Yet when Dr. Middleton ventured to expose the *pious frauds*, or (to use the language of St. Paul) the *lying wonders and unrighteous deceits* of those early times, your Lordship must remember, what great offence his publication gave, not to Papists only, but to Protestant divines. And no wonder, for since the monkish system of religious belief, and the mode of worshipping the eternal Deity as incarnate in the body of one of his own creatures, which was established at that time, by the interposition of the Imperial Power, is the very same which is professed and practised at this day by Protestants as well as Papists, should it be proved, that the religious establishment of the fourth century stands clearly branded with the most conspicuous and unquestionable marks of the predicted Apostacy, a consequence would inevitably follow, too obvious for those Divines not to see, or for your Lordship to misapprehend.—It might then indeed, with no small

reason be suspected, that the fatal tree of Antichristian superstition was really planted in the beginning of that century by the hand of the civil power, and hath, ever since, been cherished and cultivated by the same; that, at length it shot forth with such an excessive, wild luxuriance, as often to impede and stop the course of the very power that planted it; that, in these circumstances, the reforming princes diligently lopped off those boughs which most incommoded them, those especially which hung more immediately in the way of wise or expedient policy, but the root, the trunk, and main branches they left fair and flourishing, and even engaged themselves still to protect the same baneful tree in that state to which they had contracted it; that the fruit therefore which it yields in Protestant, may perhaps be less in quantity than what it produces in Roman Catholic countries; but its quality must be the same in both; and in both, totally unlike the fruits of that evangelical tree which *Paul* planted, the fruits of moral righteousness and mutual love.

There are two other circumstances in this prophecy well deserving our particular notice, viz. the unrighteousness which would prevail under the influence of this Apostacy; and the amazing infatuation of the people, which would
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suffer them *to believe a lye* : but these being the special subjects of two other predictions of the same Apostle, I only mention them here in passing.

In the fourth chapter of his first Epistle to Timothy, St. Paul very briefly, but with the most positive assurance, that his prophecy was the dictates of divine inspiration, again foretells the Apostacy from the Christian faith, and clearly describes the ecclesiastical authors of it, as men “ who should give heed to
 “ doctrines of demons or the ghosts of deceased
 “ men and women, and who, for the sake of
 “ propagating their Antichristian superstition,
 “ would hypocritically affirm direct falsehoods,
 “ without any compunction of conscience, for-
 “ bidding to marry, and enjoining fasting and
 “ abstinence from meats, which is not com-
 “ manded in the Gospel.” These characters of the corrupt teachers of Religion are so plain and express, that they cannot be mistaken, and since all those upon whom these marks are found, are equally liable to the predicted guilt of apostatizing from the Christian faith, it does not seem in any degree candid, to endeavour to throw the whole odium of *Antichristianism* upon the Church of Rome. It is true, indeed, the ministers of that Church do teach doctrines of
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an intermediate state of punishment of the souls of the wicked, previous to the final judgment: and allot a state of heavenly felicity to those of Saints and Martyrs, whom, as being the peculiar favourites of the Deity, they regard as powerful intercessors in their behalf. It is certain also, that they have on many occasions, with equal confidence and hypocrisy, imposed upon the credulity of the people, by fictitious prodigies and *lying wonders*. They likewise forbid marriage to many members of their communion, and strictly enjoin the keeping of Lent and other seasons of fasting and extraordinary abstinence. But then the Greek Church does the same, and therefore is as certainly guilty of Apostacy as the Church of Rome. Nay, it is notorious, that all the Churches both of the Eastern and Western Empires, for more than four hundred years before the Popes acquired their plenitude of power, taught and practised exactly the same things. And therefore, if this prophetic description merits any regard, they had all apostatized from the original and true faith of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In the third chapter of his second epistle to the same Timothy, the Apostle hath given us another prophetic note of that astonishing Apostacy, which is the subject of his two former

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predictions; from whence we learn, that the Disciples of the corrupt and false religion would assume an external form and profession of godliness, but be so far from admitting the power and influence of it into their hearts, that they would commit sins most expressly prohibited in the Gospel, and be guilty of every vice of which human nature is capable.

This general immorality of the Apostate Christians, was plainly intimated also to the Thessalonians, in the prophecy considered above. And the whole world is witness, how truly this predicted circumstance hath been fulfilled in the lives of nominal Christians of every country in Christendom, from the beginning of the fourth century to the present hour. From this mark and character of Antichrist, at least, (though it be, without doubt, the worst and most deplorable of all) even Protestant Churches cannot plead exemption. This sad truth your Lordship ingenuously acknowledges * and confesses, that *to thinking and inquisitive men*, it affords an almost insuperable objection to the divine authority of the Gospel. But then, the prophecies, your Lordship tells us, are able to remove all our scruples on this account; for when we learn from them, that “the worst

* Serm. 12, p. 413.

“ that

“ that has happened was foreseen, and the best
 “ that we can conceive will hereafter come to
 “ pass, the reasonable expectations of men are
 “ answered, and the honour of God’s govern-
 “ ment is abundantly vindicated.” For my
 own part, my Lord, I freely own, that had it
 not been for the very convincing, supernatural
 testimony which these predictions bear to the
 truth and heavenly origin of the Gospel of
 Christ, the avowed design of its publication,
 compared with that depraved state of morality
 which hath prevailed for more than fourteen
 hundred years, and still continues to prevail
 throughout all Christendom, would have in-
 duced me absolutely to reject the whole of the
 Christian revelation, as fabulous and false. For
 it is evidently impossible, in the very nature of
 things, that an all-wise and all-powerful Being
 should ordain means for the professed purpose
 of effecting a particular end, which neverthe-
 less, upon experience, should be found incapa-
 ble of accomplishing that end. But whilst a
 studious attention to the prophecies entirely re-
 moved my scruples, and confirmed my faith in
 the revelation by Jesus Christ, it at the same
 time led me to a conviction of another kind,
 which seems to me so obvious, and even to fol-
 low so directly by necessary consequence, that I
 wonder

wonder how it should have escaped your Lordship's notice. I mean, *that wheresoever the external profession of Religion is, by the generality of the people, made consistent with the vices and immorality described in this prophecy, the Religion professed, is not the pure and genuine religion of Jesus Christ, but the profane superstition of the Antichristian Apostacy.* For the sole obstacle to the moral influence of the Gospel, and the only cause of vicious and iniquitous practices amongst professed Christians, alledged in these prophecies is, that Apostacy. If therefore we should suppose any one of those Churches, which have renounced the usurped supremacy of the bishop of Rome, to have thoroughly reformed the principles and doctrines of its religion, and restored the pure simplicity of the Christian faith; and that, notwithstanding this reformation, the immorality of its members still continues; and descends through several generations, without the least grounds to hope for any amendment in the public example from the influence of the received Religion; in this case, my Lord, since the declared intent of the Christian faith is to teach men *to live soberly, righteously and godly* *, and to make them happy by turning them from their iniquities †, the difficulty would re-

* Titus ii, 12.

† Acts iii, 26.

turn upon us with all its force; and we must be obliged either to reject the divine authority of the Gospel, or to admit that infinitely wise Omnipotence makes use of means inadequate to the ends it proposes. Or else, we must give up our supposition in favour of the reformed Church, and conclude, that whatever alteration she may have made in her discipline, or in respect of some particular tenets, she still adheres to the fundamental articles, and retains the most pernicious doctrines of Antichristianism. Upon this conclusion indeed, it were easy to account for the depraved morals of the people in such a Church; and yet to vindicate the wisdom and goodness of Divine Providence in the promulgation of the Gospel to the world, almighty God hath amply supplied mankind with spiritual, as well as corporeal food, both salutary and agreeable; but he hath left them also freedom of will and choice: and if in either case, they perversely resolve to reject the wholesome and grateful viands his bounty hath set before them, and feed on poison, what wonder is it, or who but themselves can be blamed, if the constitution either of their minds or bodies become diseased and vitiated? Were the fatal delusion that now upholds this Apostacy, for ever to prevent those salutary effects which the Gos-

pel is calculated to produce, the ways of God in the Christian dispensation, could not be vindicated to men. But it becomes every day more manifest, that agreeably to St. Paul's prediction that delusion already wears away apace in our own, and I hope, in other countries too: and from these prophecies we learn it to be the divine will, that at length, the impious follies of Antichristianism shall be every where abolished, and the pure and simple, and *unconstrained* principles of true Religion, as taught by Jesus Christ, be universally adopted in their stead. We learn this, I say, to be the will of God, and we know, that his will must, in due time, be perfectly accomplished, whether we are solicitous to promote it or not. But yet, as it is the subject of our daily prayers, so doubtless, it ought to be of our daily endeavours, that *God's will be done.*

As, in his first prophecy concerning this Apostacy, St. Paul assures us, that under it the people would *believe a lie*, so in this he informs us, that the teachers of the Antichristian religion would *resist the truth*. And, resuming the subject in the following chapter, he acquaints Timothy, that the fatal time would come, when professed Christians would *not endure sound doctrine*, but would *turn away their ears from the*

truth, and be turned unto fables. Now, my Lord, these particular strokes of the prophetic pencil, appear to me to merit a much more attentive consideration than Protestants in general seem inclined to give them. For let them fix the charge of the Antichristian Apostacy wheresoever they please, since, according to these prophecies, the Apostate Church must both have adopted articles of belief, which are *fabulous and false*, and also have absolutely rejected *the truth* and all *sound doctrine*, should they themselves profess *any*, especially any *fundamental* articles of the religious belief and doctrine of the accused Church, their own accusation will inevitably recoil upon themselves. For instance, let us once more take it for granted, that your Lordship's charge against the Church of Rome is justly founded, and that the Religion of that Church is the Antichristianism of the evangelical prophecies. It must then incontestibly follow, that her Creed is entirely composed of *fables* and *falsehood*, without so much as the intermixture of *the truth* and *sound doctrine* of the Gospel. Now, the fundamental articles of the professed belief of our own Church, are the doctrines set forth in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds: for by them our Divines interpret even the Apostle's Creed itself; upon them the su-
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perstructure of our public liturgy is manifestly erected, and that they are the *true* and *sound doctrines* of the religion of Jesus Christ, the orthodox members of our Church undertake to demonstrate by scholastic syllogisms, and our legislature by—the *ratio ultima regum*. Does then the Church of Rome, my Lord, really *reject* the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, deny *the truth* of them, and refuse to *endure* the *doctrines* they contain? So far from it, that she also professes and stedfastly adheres to them both. Nay it is notorious, that one of them is her own peculiar fabrication and composition. Surely, therefore, *men of thought and inquiry* must conclude, either that the fundamental articles of our own Religion are not *the truth* and *sound doctrine*, according to the Gospel of Christ, or else, that the Church of Rome is not an Apostate, Antichristian Church. And, since no other Church can be found, in whom these predictions are in any degree better fulfilled, St. Paul, upon the latter supposition, will be found a false prophet, and a very material part of *the testimony of Jesus* will prove deficient.

These arguments, my Lord, which have forced themselves upon my mind, in consequence of an attentive, but I trust, a candid perusal of the learned Apostle's prophetic warnings and
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admonitions, I have myself weighed with the most scrupulous exactness; and the consideration of every interest I have in the present world made me wish to find some error, either in the premises or conclusion; but it is not in my power to discern any. At the same time, I confess myself not a little puzzled, to conceive how it happens, if I really am not mistaken, that men like your Lordship, who, with such pre-eminent talents, read and think and write about the very same prophecies, either can avoid meeting with any of these perplexing difficulties; or else, are able to surmount them all, with such perfect satisfaction and tranquillity of mind.

But it is from the prophetic vision, recorded by St. John in the thirteenth chapter of the Apocalypse, and the interpretation given of it in the seventeenth, that the Protestant Commentators, with great reason, endeavour chiefly to deduce the notes and characters of the predicted Apostacy. We will next therefore, with your Lordship's leave, take a view of the visionary scene there described, and examine candidly, whether it, in any degree, favours the *exclusive* charge of Antichristianism, which your Lordship and many others, think proper to fix upon the Church of Rome.

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The Apostle tells us *, that he saw *a beast rise up out of the sea*, that is, out of Europe (which, in the language of the Jewish Scriptures, is, for a very obvious reason, denominated *the isles of the sea*) *having seven heads and ten horns*. From this last circumstance, it is evident, that the *beast*, here described, is the very same which is the chief subject of Daniel's vision above cited. And if we compare the interpretation given to the Jewish Prophet, of the meaning of the ten horns, with that given to the Apostle, in the seventeenth chapter of this Revelation, there cannot remain a doubt but that in both the visions, this *beast*, is a prophetic type of the *civil* power of the Roman empire, considered, in this prophecy of the New Testament, first, as subsisting under its sixth or imperial form of Government; then, as being for a short space of time only semi-imperial; and lastly, as consisting of that pol- larchy, into which the semi-empire was broken by the incursions of the northern nations. In the next verse, the Prophet tells us, not only that the *beast* he saw derived its power and pre- eminence from the *Pagan* Roman empire, which he had typically represented in the preceding chapter by a seven-headed *dragon*, but also, that it was in form *like a leopard*, with *the feet of*

* Rev. xiii, 1—7.

a bear,

a bear, and the mouth of a lion. Now although, from the crowns it wore upon the ten horns, as well as from some other circumstances of the vision, we may reasonably conclude, that the prophetic scene chiefly represents the state of things within the bounds of the Western semi-empire only, yet, since *a lion, a bear, and a leopard*, are the very emblems used, in the vision of Daniel, to represent the three successive empires of Babylon, Persia, and Greece, the compound emblem of the empire, here described by St. John, must, at least, signify, that at the commencement of this prophetic period, the civil power of Rome was not confined to Europe: but, that its dominion was still undivided; and, if not of the same extent, to which it was carried in the reign of the Pagan emperor Trajan, yet that it included many of the countries heretofore subject to those three preceding empires. And, if we consider well the time when the seat of Government was transferred from Rome to Constantinople, we shall, perhaps, discern the reason why the Roman power is here represented as more particularly resembling the Grecian, than any other, and shall be able, with no small degree of probability, to ascertain the true date of that revolution in the affairs of the Roman empire, at which the epocha of this
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prophecy commences, and which is here typified by the dethroning of *the seven-headed dragon*, and the exaltation of *the seven-headed beast*. In the hostile invasions of the barbarous nations, the *seventh*, or semi-imperial *head* of this emblematic *beast* was, indeed, *wounded to death*; but by the astonishing unanimity, wherewith the various sovereignties, that arose in its stead (which are here represented by the ten crowned horns), combined to support the very same mode of religion, that had been established by the emperors, the *deadly wound*, so far as the grand object of this prophecy is concerned, was effectually *healed*, and therefore the civil power of Europe is, all along, considered by the Prophet as constituting but one political body, though appearing, at different periods, under those various forms of government, that are prefigured, in this vision, by the *heads* and *horns* of the *beast*. In the fourth verse, the Prophet tells us, that, as divine honours were paid to the Pagan emperors of Rome, so the homage due to God alone should be rendered to the possessors of the supreme civil power described in this prophecy. The deification of the Pagan emperors is universally known: and if it shall appear, that ever since the empire became Christian, all its sovereigns, whether in its im-

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perial, semi-imperial, or pollarchical state, have invaded the peculiar province of the Almighty, and, in the affairs of religion, arrogated and exercised over their subjects such a spiritual power and authority as belongs to God alone, we shall surely be struck with such an astonishing correspondence between the antitype and the type, and be convinced, that the dictates of this prophecy proceeded, indeed, from that intelligence, which alone is able to discern future events as certainly and clearly as things already past. This spiritual tyranny, assumed and exercised with blasphemous arrogance, St. John goes on to inform us, would *prosper*, or continue without check or restraint for one thousand two hundred and sixty years : a circumstance which (as I have before suggested) is, of itself, sufficient to satisfy us, that it cannot be the ecclesiastical supremacy of the bishops of Rome, which is here spoken of : for, besides that the Greek Church never acknowledged that supremacy, the utmost duration of the Papal tyranny over many of those Churches where the Pope's pre-eminence was allowed, falls far short of the period here expressly predicted. But indeed it is, on many accounts, impossible to interpret this part of the prophetic vision, as typifying any thing besides the *civil power* of the Roman empire

empire in all its different forms. Of this same power, it is here likewise foretold, that it would utter *blasphemy against God, blaspheme his name and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in Heaven.*

It is, surely, very remarkable, that this charge of *blasphemy* is urged no less than four times in this chapter, and repeated again in the seventeenth, against the power represented by the seven-headed *beast*. Yet your Lordship, in the application of this prophecy to Papal Rome, is pleased to take scarce any notice of it at all. In one place, * indeed, as if the word *blasphemy* did not refer to God, but to the Church itself, your Lordship interprets the *names of blasphemy*, with which the *beast* is said to have been branded, to signify that the Roman hierarchy is *stigmatized with those crimes, which Christianity, as such, holds most opprobrious*: thereby commuting the most explicit charge of blasphemy against God, for the mere opprobrium, which must fall upon a corrupt Church, when judged by the principles of pure Christianity. And in another †, enumerating the characteristic marks of Antichristianism given us by the Apostle, in order to shew us how well they are adapted to the religion of the Church of Rome, instead of stat-

* Serm. 11, p. 401.

† Serm. 11, p. 379.

ing the charges of *blasphemy* and *idolatry* separately and distinctly, as they are really urged in the prophecy, your Lordship makes no other use of the former, than barely to derive from it an epithet for the latter, and only informs us, that one of the characters of Antichrist is *the most blasphemous idolatry*. Nay, when your Lordship proceeds to fix even this charge upon the Roman Church, as if prophetic indictments, like those in use in our own courts of judicature, admitted of expressions merely technical, the justice or propriety of which is not expected to be proved, we find the word *blasphemous*, at last, entirely sunk, and the accusation dwindles to simple *idolatry*: to idolatry too, not of that species, which by fair and obvious implication may be justly deemed, and in the sacred Scriptures, is repeatedly said to be blaspheming the invisible Deity, but a newly invented, modern species of *analogous* idolatry, unheard-of under the Mosaic covenant, and utterly unknown at the time when this prophecy was given. But I must beg leave to remark to your Lordship, that the impiety alledged by the Prophet in this chapter, is not that of acting, but of *speaking blasphemy against God*; and must repeat, that the power, against which this allegation is brought, is evidently not the *ecclesiastical*, but the *civil* power

power of the Roman empire. To form a just judgment, therefore, of this part of the prophetic vision, it is necessary to consider impartially, wherein the crime of *blasphemy* consists; and to examine whether the civil governors of Europe, both before and since the division of the imperial power, have propagated and established doctrines fairly liable to such a charge.

To speak *blasphemously*, as far as I am able to understand that expression, can only signify, to speak dishonourably of God: to speak in derogation of his Divine nature and attributes. Now, since both reason and revelation teach us, that the only true God is immutable, incorporeal, and omnipresent, should any doctrine, on the contrary, assert, that the Divine nature hath undergone a change, and assumed a corporeal form, which must needs be local, I think there can be no doubt, but such a doctrine would be highly injurious to the Deity, and derogatory from his most essential attributes, as well as most pernicious, in its consequences, to the salutary purposes of true religion. For this reason, when the Israelites, at Mount Horeb, meaning to worship the true God, erected the Golden Calf, as a fit emblem of the object of their religious adoration, it will not, I presume, be denied, that they were guilty of *the most blasphemous*

phemous idolatry. And, when exulting in the restoration of that mode of religious worship, in behalf of which they had acquired an habitual prejudice in the land of Egypt, they loudly proclaimed that four-footed image to be a just representation of the Almighty Being, whose miraculous interposition had so lately delivered them from their Egyptian bondage; whether we judge their conduct by the dictates of reason, or of the law of Moses, they were, most certainly, guilty of *speaking blasphemy against God.* Let us suppose, then, for a moment, that the means of forming the molten image had failed them, but that they had asserted, that the God, *who brought them up out of the land of Egypt*, had theretofore taken the *bovine nature* upon him in the belly of a cow, been made an ox, and had appeared in Egypt, and, though then in Heaven, still continued incarnate in the body of that animal; and that, even without the use of any visible symbol, they had instituted a form of divine worship, adapted to the name and properties of the fabulous god Apis. Surely, my Lord, in this case, both the worship and language of the Israelities would have been, at least, equally *blasphemous*, as in the other.

There may be some perhaps, who will readily allow the charge of *blasphemy* in so monstrous and disgusting an instance, as is here supposed, but who do not think it equally, nor even in any degree, blasphemous against Almighty God, to teach, that, in another place and period, he became incarnate in the body of an animal of a more excellent nature and superior rank. But certainly, whatsoever difference there may be in the natures of finite Beings, when compared with each other, there is absolutely none at all, when we consider them with respect to the infinite and eternal Creator of the universe. And consequently, both the *blasphemy* of the expression, and the impossibility of the fact, must be exactly the same, whether we affirm the Almighty to be incarnate, by having been made one of the lowest, or one of the highest order of those creatures, which his own power and goodness hath called into existence.

If then it shall be found that the emperor Constantine, and almost all those who have succeeded him in the possession of either the whole or any part of the civil power of Europe, have abused their temporal authority to the purpose of propagating, and enforcing upon their subjects, the doctrine of the Incarnation of the infinite unchangeable Deity, with all the gross
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absurdities and impieties that necessarily flow from such a source, shall we not be forced to acknowledge, that they have indeed, *opened their mouths in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name and his tabernacle?* Shall we not also both see and admire the singular propriety of the prophetic language, in fixing this charge of *blasphemy* upon the temporal rulers and not upon the ecclesiastics, when we consider, that these are of necessity under the dominion of the former; that the impiety or innocence of such a doctrine is a question of common sense, not of theological science; that even if any Scripture could be produced wherein it was expressly warranted, the doctrine itself would afford much stronger reasons for rejecting such a Scripture, than the best authenticated Scripture could do for admitting so blasphemous a doctrine; and that nothing less than that powerful influence upon the strongest passions of the human mind, which must needs be the effect of the rigid pains and penalties on one hand, and the alluring rewards and emoluments on the other, annexed by the laws of the state to the rejection and admission of this particular tenet, could have induced mankind so far to abandon their own sense of right and wrong, to give up every rational and becoming idea of the eternal Deity, and

and to submit patiently, nay to adhere with obstinacy to so gross and impious a *delusion*? But as things were long circumstanced in every state of Christendom, it was, in a very high degree, dangerous for any man to venture to see with his own eyes, and avow the most obvious dictates of his understanding respecting this first and most important article of theology. For the legislative power having, in consequence of this boldest and most unreasonable *petitio principii*, that ever was heard of, proceeded to assert, that a particular created Being, an earthly animal was the one true God, and the proper object of divine worship; if any reflecting, conscientious Christian was led to question the truth and piety of that orthodox persuasion, he was immediately, with the most uncharitable and opprobrious language, accused of *denying the divinity* of the legal and only God; and the bigotted zeal of some, and the malicious rancour of others, recurred eagerly to the inhuman edicts and avenging arm of the civil magistrate to condemn and punish, as a *blasphemer*, the man who only meant to avoid the guilt of so heinous a sin, and no longer dared to join his voice in uttering *blasphemy* against the infinite majesty and incommunicable attributes of that awful

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Being, whom an inspired teacher of Christianity assures us, *No man ever hath seen nor can see* *.

Having mentioned the impossibility of the *Incarnation* of God, as well as the *blasphemy* of such a doctrine, lest I should appear to speak rashly, and to revile long-established opinions without sufficient grounds, I beg your Lordship to consider, that the Deity is, in his very nature, omnipresent; that his becoming incarnate, in a particular body, evidently implies his being more immediately present with that body, than with any other; whereas the very meaning of omnipresence is, that he is equally present, equally closely connected, as far as such a Being can properly be said to be connected, with all the bodies of the universe. Your Lordship will be pleased likewise to recollect, that God is immutable, another attribute absolutely inconsistent with his *Incarnation*. To evince this, let us only attend to the commonly-received opinion of man, as a Being compounded of two natures, the one spiritual, the other carnal. Allowing this idea to be just, and that, at the dissolution of this composition by death, man exists simply in a spiritual state, it is certain, that the alteration made by death in the mode of his existence, is the greatest change such a

* 1 Tim. vi, 16,

compound Being can undergo. It is evident, therefore, that were a purely spiritual Being, such as the soul of man is usually presumed to be, when separated from the body, to become compounded with a carnal nature like our own, he would suffer a change exactly equivalent to that, which man is said to suffer at his death. And, since the difference between the nature of God and that of the most perfect created Being is infinitely great, to assert that he, who hath existed from all eternity in a spiritual, incorporeal, uncompounded state, hath at length adopted another mode of existence, and is become compounded with a material, animal body, is to assert, that the only unchangeable Being in the universe hath undergone a change infinitely greater than any of his own mutable creatures can undergo.

Having, in the next place, predicted the cruel oppression of conscientious Christians, in consequence of this impious, spiritual tyranny, usurped by the civil magistrate, which would prevail irresistibly and universally, the prophet, at the eleventh verse, proceeds to give us a typical description of another very important personage in the drama of Antichristianism, perfectly distinct from the foregoing, though, in the application of this prophecy to the episco-

pal See of Rome, your Lordship is pleased to confound them both together, as if they were but one and the same.

Of the visionary emblem of the *civil* power of the Roman empire, St. John, with strict propriety, informs us, it arose *out of the sea*, that is, out of Europe. But, of the second object of the prophetic vision, he says, *I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth*, that is, out of the great Continent of Asia and Africa, *and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon*. This same personage (as is evident, from the characters given of it in both places) is afterwards called *the false Prophet* *, that is, a Teacher of a false Religion; it plainly denotes therefore, the ecclesiastical ministry of the Antichristian superstition, a successive priesthood, having, indeed, the semblance of a Christian ministry, but, really, propagating idolatry and displaying the haughty arrogance and ambition of Pagan pontiffs and princes; by intrigue and artifice, influencing and directing the authority, and acquiring to itself the exercise of the temporal power of the civil government, leading the people into error, and imposing upon their ignorance and credulity by pretended miracles,

* Rév. xix, 20.

er, as St. Paul expresses it, by *unrighteous de-
vils* and *lying wonders*.

Your Lordship sees, that I understand the contrasted terms, *sea* and *earth*, made use of in describing the local origin of the two visionary *beasts*, in the same sense with Sir Isaac Newton. And notwithstanding the different interpretation of succeeding commentators (the cause of which it were not difficult to assign), I am persuaded, it is the only precise, consistent meaning of which those words, so opposed to each other, are capable, or that is warranted by the use of such sort of expressions in other parts of the Holy Scripture. Even figurative language, to be intelligible, must have some one fixed and certain signification. And it were to be wished, that all interpreters of the Prophecies would consider well, that in proportion as the prophetic language is represented vague and undeterminate, the prediction itself must appear unsatisfactory and insufficient for the purpose of bearing testimony to Jesus, for which it is intended. Had this truth been always duly attended to, I am inclined to think your Lordship's self would not have been so strenuous an advocate for the *double sense* of any prophecy; and that too, merely for the sake of defending the authenticity

* Serm. iii, p. 61, &c.

of a particular Scripture of the received Canon, which, after all your Lordship's learned and ingenious efforts, whenever it comes to be fully, fairly and impartially examined, will be found to be indefensible.

According to this sense of the words, *out of the earth*, the first corruptors of the Christian religion are so far from being justly ascribed to Rome, that the prophecy itself expressly teaches us, they would originate in Asia and Africa. And though most Protestant commentators, to serve their particular purpose against the Church of Rome, are pleased to overlook that circumstance, it is, beyond all question, notorious, that the event, in this instance also, hath strictly corresponded to the terms of the prediction. Nice, which in the first ecumenical council was *the author*, in the seventh was *the finisher* of the Antichristian superstition. And, since your Lordship hath thought fit to assert, that as Babylon was the first of all idolatrous cities in the Heathen world, so Rome was in the Christian *, I shall not, I hope, be thought impertinent, if I call upon your Lordship to name any one instance of idolatry, or Antichristian superstition of any kind ever practised in the Church of Rome, which was not introduced by

* Serm. xi, p. 375.

the ecclesiastics of Asia and Africa, even in the fourth century, and which Rome herself did not derive from Alexandria, and the Churches of the East. Should your Lordship answer Transubstantiation; I apprehend that instance would be thought no justification of the charge brought against Rome, that she hath been the first source of *all Antichristian idolatry*. And I must beg leave to remark to your Lordship, that even the monstrous doctrine of transubstantiation is built upon the *orthodox* and *Protestant* principles of the Athanasian Creed; and, so long as that remains the standard of the Catholic Faith cannot be satisfactorily confuted. At whatever period, and in whatever place so preposterous an article of belief was first supposed to be taught in the sixth chapter of the Gospel according to St. John, since it hath always been represented as one of the *mysteries* of religion, it is no more an object of the human understanding than the doctrine of the Trinity itself: and till Protestants will allow the touchstone of sense and reason to be applied to all religious *mysteries*, they cannot, without the most unpardonable inconsistency, apply it to any. Our natural reason, indeed, assures us, that what we see and taste, to be bread and wine, cannot be flesh and blood: but so it does also, that the Father and

the Son cannot be one and the same being. And, therefore, it is with no less propriety than art, that Father Philips * accuses the reformers of impiously daring to bring the sacred mysteries of religion to the test of reason and their bodily senses. The testimony of sense then being declared incompetent, in the case of mystery, both by Protestants and Papists, the only remaining argument against the doctrine of transubstantiation is that, which hath been so often urged by the reformed divines, and is particularly adopted by our own Church †, respecting the necessary locality of a human body, and the natural impossibility that the same body of Jesus Christ should be in Heaven and on earth, and in many different places of the earth, at the same instant of time. But, if the doctrine of the Protestant Creed of Athanasius be true, this argument is evidently fallacious; for we are there taught, that the *manhood* of Jesus Christ, and consequently his fleshly body, was *taken into God*, that is, was deified. According to this Creed, therefore, the human body of Christ hath had all the attributes of Deity communicated to it; and since one of these is ubiquity, the whole

* Life of C. Pole.

† See the Advertisement after the Communion Service.

difficulty,

difficulty, upon which this argument is founded, vanishes at once.

But, though it is certain, the idolatrous corruptions of our Religion did not originate at Rome, yet the Roman Church very early caught the shameful infection, which soon spread itself over all the churches of the Western, as it had before done over those of the Eastern empire. The general extension of this fatal contagion of Antichristian superstition, especially in the West, was not only much facilitated, but rendered almost inevitable by a very singular circumstance, which is particularly predicted in this prophetic vision. The apostate ecclesiastics, the Prophet tells us, by their intrigues and influence, procured an *image* of the civil power to be set up, and were able to give it such an active energy, that it could utter decrees and ordinances, and cause those, who refused to worship it, that is, to pay implicit obedience to it in all religious concerns, to be put to death ; and prohibit from *buying or selling* all of every degree, who did not openly profess religious servitude to the civil magistrate. Such an *image* of temporal power, contrary to every principle, not of Christianity only, but even of sound policy, did the Latin emperors erect, and all the succeeding princes

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of Europe uphold, when they established the Hierarchy and its courts of spiritual jurisdiction.

The authority of ecclesiastics, with respect both to this world and the next, is altogether groundless and *imaginary*. Yet the Hierarchy once formed, with much artifice and by degrees, acquired to itself the power of inflicting the severest penalties on those it deemed delinquents, and even of condemning them to the most barbarous deaths. If we understand the Prophet's *buying and selling* in the literal sense, the excommunication of Heretics, that is, of those who profess not the theological tenets by law established, affords us the most convincing proof of the full completion of this part of the prophetic vision. But it is to be observed, that the language of this prophecy is almost everywhere figurative. And, since the apostate Church is called the City Babylon, and, in the eighteenth chapter is represented as carrying on a most extensive and gainful traffick, and her teachers are described as merchants; the causing *that no man might buy or sell* who wore not the badge of servitude to the Religion of the civil magistrate, may, with great reason, be interpreted to signify the prohibiting all persons from giving or receiving any religious instructions, but what were conformable to that standard.

ard of belief, which the ruling powers, for the time being, decreed to be truly orthodox. A degree of religious tyranny, which we know was actually exercised, through the influence of every established Church, from the beginning of the fourth century to the latter end of the sixteenth; but which, agreeably to the term prescribed for its duration in this Prophecy, hath since then been every where gradually and very visibly declining.

The period of one thousand two hundred and sixty years is the common measure made use of in this vision to determine the duration of all the great objects of the Prophecy. The suppression of the true Christian Church, or, in the figurative language of this book, *the treading the holy city under foot, or the abode of the eagle-winged woman in the wilderness*; the persecuted state of *the two faithful witnesses*, in other words, of the very few conscientious Christians, who would dare to remonstrate against the falshoods and corruptions of the Catholic Apostacy; and, lastly, the impious tyranny of the civil magistrate in the concerns of conscience and religion, are all expressly predicted to continue for one thousand two hundred and sixty years. And no man, who attends to the purport of the Prophecy, and considers the nature of those several events, can forbear agreeing with the

learned and sagacious Mr. Mead, that they are all synchronal. But these parts of the Apostle's vision are all prophetic of the grossest abuses in matters of Religion, and of a general and total defection from Christianity to Antichristianism, accompanied with a sad depravity of morals. And as the maxim, *Nemo repente fuit turpissimus*, so often and so justly applied to individuals, holds much more strongly of large communities, it should be observed, that both the corruption and reformation of the Church, and the subversion and restoration of religious liberty, in the very nature of things, must needs be gradually, not instantly effected. Consequently, it is but reasonable to expect, that the distance of time from the first invasion of the rights of conscience, to the first interposition of temporal power in favour of religious freedom, should correspond to the prophetic cycle of one thousand two hundred and sixty years, as well as that, which shall hereafter appear to have elapsed from the completion of religious slavery to the perfect restitution of liberty of conscience.

At what æra then shall we date the commencement of the recovery of religious liberty? Your Lordship, with much classic elegance, hath told us *, that at the Reformation or, (to speak more

* Serm. 7, p. 241.

properly) the separation of several Churches from the Communion of Rome, which was accomplished in the former part of the sixteenth century, *Liberty came at last*. Before which *great event* your Lordship is pleased to observe, *the Christian world had slumbered in its chains, for full ten ages*. Why your Lordship should say *ten ages*, I am at a loss to understand, because you yourself have, in the very same sermon, clearly shewn, that universal supremacy was not so much as claimed by the bishops of Rome before the seventh century; and from thence to the sixteenth can be no more than nine centuries. But allowing the spiritual dominion of papal Rome over the Christian world to have been really exercised for ten centuries, it still seems unaccountable, that your Lordship, in that usurpation of the Roman Pontiffs, should find a satisfactory completion of the predicted Antichristian tyranny of the *seven-headed beast* of St. John's vision, because, according to the express, repeated terms of the prophecy, that tyranny was to *prosper* for one thousand two hundred and sixty years. But, in truth my Lord, what liberty did the Christian world gain at the so much boasted reformation? The ecclesiastics of particular countries, indeed, emancipated

cipated themselves from their subordination to the See of Rome : but, under the protection, and by the support of the civil magistrate, they all established Hierarchies of their own, conformable to their several systems ; and as, in these establishments, neither the Lutheran, the Calvinist, nor the English reformers paid any more regard to the natural rights of conscience, and the promotion of true religious liberty, than the Church of Rome itself, the people only changed their masters, and they, who no longer *slumbered* in them, were in every part of Europe, most sorely galled by the chains of spiritual slavery. In our own country, my Lord, to talk of any degree of religious freedom prior to the grand rebellion in the reign of Charles I. were jesting with us. So long as the unhappy fate of many heretics, in the reigns of Edward, Elizabeth and James ; so long as the ecclesiastical administration of Archbishop Laud, and the cruel barbarities of the courts of Star-chamber and High commission ; so long as the inhuman persecution of the Quakers shall continue to disgrace our annals, so long will they afford irrefragable proofs, that *religious liberty*, however *late*, came not into this kingdom at the reformation.

The first civil government in Europe, which authoritatively restored any considerable degree of spiritual freedom to its subjects, was the Republic of the Seven United Provinces. The union of Utrecht was made in the year 1579, and in 1583, by general agreement, the free exercise of all modes of Religion, without question or controul, was tolerated throughout the Seven Provinces. But, for more than five years after the Union, the condition of the *embryo* Republic was so wretched and forlorn, that the impression of their first coin was a ship violently agitated by the waves, without sails or oars, with the motto, *Incertum quo fata ferunt*. However laudable therefore the intentions of the States were in this respect, being little able to vindicate their own civil authority, they were necessarily incapable of securing to their subjects the proposed liberty in religious matters; till the Queen of England entered into a treaty of alliance with them, and not only acknowledged, but also effectually enabled them to establish and maintain their independency. Now, my Lord, it is well known, that the sanction given by the imperial authority of Constantine to the decrees and confession of faith of the first council of Nice was the first instance of the abuse of the civil power, in violating liberty of conscience in the articles of Religion. And it is not

not a little remarkable, that the formulary of belief then drawn up, and which, with a very few additions, hath ever since been deemed the true standard of the orthodox faith, was branded with the most indisputable mark of the uncharitable, intolerant, vindictive spirit of Antichristianism, in the Anathema originally subjoined to it, against all those who dissented from the doctrine it contained. That celebrated council, your Lordship knows, was held in or about the year 325. And it is highly deserving your Lordship's attentive consideration, that, if to the year 325, we add the prophetic number of one thousand two hundred and sixty years, it brings us to the year 1585, the very year when the English government, being induced to ratify the above-mentioned treaty with the Dutch, became instrumental in restoring to the inhabitants of the Netherlands a much greater degree of religious freedom than the influence of the Hierarchy hath ever yet permitted to be legally secured to the subjects of this realm, although the annals of the same memorable year are signally distinguished in our history, by very strenuous efforts of the Commons' House of Parliament, for that truly Christian purpose. But though the States General have the honour of being the first European

pean potentates, that restrained the abuse of the civil power in spiritual concerns, and ordained a general toleration ; yet Holland was not the only country in which the cause of religious liberty was countenanced, and gained ground at the very same æra. The year 1585 will be for ever famous in the history of France, for the religious war of the *Fronde*, begun and carried on by the confederates upon the intolerant, inhuman principles of Antichristian superstition, in which Christendom beheld a new and singular phœnomenon, a royal prince, next heir to the throne of France, in arms, and at the head of a powerful party, contending not to oppress the Roman Catholics or any other sect, but merely to protect the Protestants of that kingdom, and procure for them the quiet enjoyment of the same religious liberty, which the Papists themselves enjoyed : a conduct, both in its principles and in its consequences, diametrically opposite to that of the emperor Constantine one thousand two hundred and sixty years before.

It is surely very remarkable, my Lord, that the date of these great events, evidently conducing to the subversion of that spiritual thralldom, which had so long prevailed in every principality of Europe, should thus exactly coincide with the prophetic period, computing from what

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every unprejudiced person must deem the first encroachment of the temporal power upon the rights of private judgment. But what shall we say, if it should appear also, that at the same interval of one thousand two hundred and sixty years, computed severally from each of the ecumenical councils, whose religious ordinances were enforced by the authority of the emperors, and which were therefore distinguished steps in the progress of that spiritual tyranny, by which all Christendom at length became so ignominiously enslaved; corresponding events have occurred, whereby the restitution of religious liberty hath been as signally promoted? I have not, at present, an opportunity of particularly examining how the case stands in other countries of Europe: but, in our own, the year 1641, which is exactly 1260 years from 381, the year of the second general council, is very strongly marked both by the abolition of the iniquitous courts of Star-chamber and High-commission, and by the commencement of an intestine war between the legislative estates of the kingdom, begun chiefly upon account of ecclesiastical oppression, and which, in its consequences, hath been productive of a much greater degree of liberty, both civil and religious, to this nation, than it ever enjoyed before. The two succeeding councils,

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to which only, of all that followed, the present era permits us to extend the observation, were holden in the years 431 and 451; to each of of which numbers, if we add one thousand two hundred and sixty, we shall have the years 1691 and 1711; the first rendered memorable, not only by the completion of the glorious revolution in the entire reduction of Ireland; and the consequent secure establishment of that great patron and champion of religious liberty, William III. upon the triple throne of the British isles; but also by the mortal blow given to the pretended apostolic, divine right and authority of the Hierarchy, in the deprivation of the Non-juring bishops; and the appointment of others in their room; the latter distinguished in our ecclesiastical history, by the fruitless attempts of the Convocation to revive the spirit of persecution against the Arian Heresy, in the case of Mr. Whiston. As the same causes always produce the same effects, the temper of that orthodox English synod was equally uncharitable, equally vindictive with that of the general councils of the fourth or fifth centuries: but, agreeably to the predictions of this prophecy, the disposition of the ruling powers towards the Hierarchy was greatly altered. Government tacitly refused to second, or even to countenance their intemperate, unchristian zeal.

And to this attack upon Mr. Whiston, with what followed six years afterwards, on account of Dr. Hoadley's sermon, is undoubtedly owing, the visible restraint which hath ever since been most wisely laid upon the ecclesiastical authority, and that the Convocation, once so turbulent and so formidable, is now—*vox & præterea nihil.*

That the inspired prophet hath, with great propriety, represented the Hierarchy as the *image* of the civil power, every impartial observer must surely acknowledge, who considers, that in itself it hath no inherent vigour nor vital principal, but depends altogether upon the temporal governors of the state, for whatever degree of energy it possesses, for its form, and even for its existence; that under the imperial administration of the civil government of Europe, the mode of the established Hierarchy was imperial also, and because Rome was the metropolis of the empire, its bishop as metropolitan, was made supreme head of the Church; that as the empire itself, by the irruption of the northern nations, was broken into many different governments, all concurring to support the very same mode of Religion and ecclesiastical discipline, which had been established by the emperors, so, by the hostile efforts of the reformers, the

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empire of the Church was violently rent into several smaller Hierarchies, all agreeing to enforce the very same system of theology, the same *fundamental* articles of religious doctrine, which had been declared orthodox under the Popes; that the Lutherans being countenanced and protected by several princes of Germany, who are themselves controulable by the Diet of the empire, adopted a kind of episcopacy, subject to the superior authority of a Consistory *, whilst the Calvinists, whose chief asylum was the Republic of Geneva, formed their Hierarchy after the Democratic model; and that in England, where the executive branch of government is monarchical, the active part of the Hierarchy remained episcopal, and the upper and lower houses of Convocation, with the King for their supreme head, formed an ecclesiastical legislature, in all respects, *the image* of the great legislature of the state.

Having thus briefly remarked upon the chief matters contained in the thirteenth chapter of this prophetic vision, we will, in the last place,

* In the monarchies of Sweden and Denmark, where also the Lutheran is the established mode of Religion, the Church government is perfectly episcopal, that is of a monarchical construction. See Mosheim. *Inst. Eccl. Hist.* Sæc. 16. Sect. 3. Pars. 2. C. 1. § 4.

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with your Lordship's leave, consider the very same objects in the different point of view, in which they are placed in the seventeenth; premising, that, in the intermediate prediction of her future destruction, the apostate Church is denominated *the great city Babylon*, and all the nations are said to have communicated in her spiritual fornication or idolatry *. This same circumstance is also predicated of the great Harlot of the seventeenth chapter, who is described as corrupting and influencing many nations, and prostituting herself to those kings of the earth who are intended in this prophecy, viz. the ruling powers of Europe. So that *the great city Babylon*, and the sumptuously-dressed woman, branded with the name of *Babylon the Great*, refer both to the same antitype, and represent alike the apostate, Antichristian Church.

Of this latter emblem of the corrupt Church, the Apostle tells us †, that he *saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-coloured beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns*. From these attributes of the *beast*, there can be no doubt but it is the same visionary emblem, which, in the thirteenth chapter, was said to arise out of the sea, and must represent the same thing in both places. But since the angel of

* Chap. xiv, 8.

† Rev. xvii, 3.

the vision hath professed to explain the secret meaning both of the woman and the beast that carried her, it is our duty to attend to the explanation he hath given us, which commences at the ninth verse, in these words, *The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.*

Your Lordship hath very elegantly demonstrated, that this *beast*, with seven heads avowedly denoting seven mountains, represents the seven-hilled city Rome; from whence your Lordship would infer, that since the apostate Church is here described as seated upon that city, and Rome is the seat of residence of the Popes, the Roman Church, *exclusive of all others*, is the Church of Antichrist. But, upon this supposition, my Lord, how did the apostate Church continue to sit upon the *seven-headed beast*, when the Popes resided and kept their court at Avignon? And, according to this idea, would not the Pope, by transferring his episcopal see from Rome to any other city of Italy, effectually remove both from himself and from the Church, over which he presides, this leading mark of the Antichristian Apostacy, without admitting in either, the least degree of religious reformation? Your Lordship cannot seriously think, that the seven-hilled city here alluded

luded to, signifies the mere streets and edifices of the city Rome. It must mean Rome in her civil state, as mistress of the world, that is, the governing power of the Roman empire. This, indeed, is clearly evident, from the subsequent explanation of the vision, given us in the prophecy itself. For the angelic myſtagogue, after informing us, that the seven heads are emblematic of that particular city which gave name to the imperial power, that is the object of the prophecy, goes on to acquaint us, that they denote likewise, the several different forms of government, under which the civil power of the Roman empire was and should be administered; that *five* of these forms were past before the time of this vision; that the sixth, *viz.* the imperial form, then subsisted; and that the seventh, which was to follow, and which I apprehend to be the semi-imperial, would *continue* but for a *short space*; that the *ten horns* are representative of a Pollarchy, into which the Western empire would be afterwards divided, making the eighth form of government, and arising out of the ruins of the seven; and that the several distinct kingdoms of this Pollarchy, should unanimously concur to support this same corrupt Religion, thereby combining to form that particular body of civil power, more especially represented

presented in this vision by the *beast*, on which the woman was seated: and, because the power of the Roman empire was actually dissipated and destroyed by the very creation of these kingdoms, and yet seemed, in some sort, to revive and be reunited by their combination, in behalf of the Apostate Church, the visionary *beast*, representing *that combined power*, is called *the beast that was, and is not, and yet is*. By way of consolation, the prophetic angel adds, that this Antichristian combination would continue only till the decrees of God were fulfilled; and that at length the Apostate Church will be detested, plundered, devoured, and utterly destroyed by the very same civil powers, by which she hath been established.

Of the woman riding upon the beast, the angel only saith, that she represents *that great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth*; by which expression some commentators understand the city that reigned over the whole known world at the time when this vision was granted to St. John. Others, as it appears to me, with much better reason, understand the meaning to be, that great city, which, at the period typified by this vision, would influence and direct the councils of the *kings of the earth*, that is, of the European States; (for they throughout this

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prophecy, are denominated, *the kings of the earth*, or earthly kings, in opposition to Jesus Christ, our spiritual and heavenly king). All, however, agree in supposing Rome to be the city here spoken of. But surely no two things can be more distinct, than *the woman* in this vision, and *the seven-headed beast*, on which she is seated. Since the latter, therefore, is allowed to be a type of the city Rome, the former cannot, by any reasonable rules of interpretation, be made to signify the same city. Besides, the true sense of the expression, *that great city*, applied to the woman, appears to be sufficiently obvious, upon the bare perusal of the Apocalypse. In the figurative language of this Prophecy, the true Christian Church is called *the holy city* and *the new Jerusalem*, and the Apostate Antichristian Church is, almost every where, called *the great city Babylon*, or *Babylon the Great*; and since that is one of the titles expressly said to be inscribed upon the forehead of this visionary woman, if the concluding words of the angel are put into literal language, their plain meaning is this, “ The woman which thou sawest in the
“ vision is an emblem of that corrupt, Apostate
“ Church, which, though it will be entirely
“ supported, and move only by the secular
“ power of the European princes, will yet in-
“ fluence

“fluence and direct their conduct in all religious concerns, as the rider guideth the way of the beast, that carrieth him.”

Having seen how the angel explains the meaning of this vision, we will return back again, if your Lordship pleases, to the vision itself, for the sake of observing more particularly the distinguishing notes and characters of the Antichristian Church, with which *the woman* is said to be branded in the forehead, that is, most conspicuously; and try whether they can, with any degree of justice, be applied *exclusively* to the Church of Rome.

The inscription is *Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots, and Abominations of the Earth*; and we are informed farther, that she was visibly guilty of shedding the blood of conscientious Christians.

Your Lordship supposes Antichrist to be merely an ecclesiastical power, and that the chief prophetic characters, by which he is to be distinguished, are only three, viz. *spiritual tyranny, intolerance and idolatry*. But, in this vision, the predicted Antichristian Apostacy is expressly attributed to the complicated power of *the Alliance between the Church and State*; and to the three characteristic marks noticed by your Lordship, two others are superadded, which your

Lordship hath thought fit to pass over in profound silence. I mean *blasphemy and mystery*. Of these five, *intolerance* is ascribed to both the parties of this celebrated *Alliance*, but the blood-guiltiness chiefly, and very justly to the Church; because the secular arm, in the inhuman murder of Heretics, hath only executed the formal judicial sentence of the ecclesiastical Courts. *Blasphemy* and *spiritual tyranny* are attributed to the civil power, which alone could establish and maintain them. And *mystery* and *idolatry* are the peculiar characters of the Church. To which must be added, from St. Paul, the fabulous falsehoods of her credenda. The Antichristian attributes of the civil magistrate, and the last-mentioned mark of the Apostate Church, have been already noticed, in the preceding remarks upon St. Paul's prophecies and upon the vision recorded in the thirteenth chapter of this Apocalypse. We will, here therefore, consider only the two remaining characters of the Antichristian Church, *mystery* and *idolatry*.

Antichrist, as your Lordship justly remarks*, signifies a power acting in opposition to Christ, consequently the Church of Antichrist must be a Church, whose doctrines and mode of religious worship are in direct contradic-

* Serm. vii, p. 415.

tion to those of the Gospel. Accordingly, in the prophetic portrait of Antichristianism, drawn by the two prophets of the New Testament, we see *the truth and soberness* of the Gospel contrasted with *fables, falsehoods and blasphemy*; the Christian spirit of *mercy, charity and universal benevolence*, with *iniquitous, oppressive violence and persecution for conscience sake*; the Gospel precepts not to *judge* one another, but to leave all *judgment* in matters of Religion to the time and person ordained by God for that purpose, with the cruel and sanguinary decisions of the Courts of ecclesiastical judicature; the *light* of Divine revelation with *mystery*; and the rational, pure and spiritual worship of the Deity, with that very *idolatry*, which it is a main design of revealed Religion to eradicate from off the earth.

Mystery signifies a thing hidden and secret, and therefore not to be understood: for which reason, (as the Gospel is declared to be *a light to lighten the nations**; professeth to teach us to know the *mysteries of the kingdom of God*†, that is, to reveal to us those things relating to *the kingdom of God*, which, before Christ, had been kept secret; exhorts us, of *our own selves*, to *judge what is right*‡, not to be *children, but men in under-*

* Luke ii, 32. † Luke viii, 10. ‡ Luke xii, 57.

standing *; and invites us to make a free and unprejudiced use of all our natural faculties, in the important business of Religion, *to see with our own eyes, hear with our own ears, and understand with our own hearts* †, that we may be *converted and healed* from those follies and vices which are as opposite to the real happiness of mankind, as they are to the revealed Will of God;) it is manifest, that, if the essential rites and doctrines of any Church whatever are *mysterious* and incomprehensible, she teaches a Religion contradictory to the Gospel of Christ, and so far corresponds with the prophetic description here given us of the Apostate church, whose first and most conspicuous character is *mystery*. The Church of Rome, for instance, which avows her whole religious Creed to be a *mystery*, absolutely incomprehensible to the human mind, which declares almost all her religious rites to be sacraments, or sacred *mysteries*, is, without doubt, branded, in the most notorious manner, with this mark of Antichristianism.

And do the several Protestant churches of Europe, my Lord, stand quite clear of the ignominious character predicted in this circumstance of the vision? Do they not all profess the

* 1 Cor. xiv, 20. † Acts xxviii, 27.

very same articles of religious belief, excepting transubstantiation (if even that may be excepted in them all *) and acknowledge their whole Creed to be an unsearchable *mystery*? And, if they have rejected, out of the number of their Sacraments, some of those rites, which the Roman church declares to be attended with a certain *mysterious, inward and spiritual grace*, do they not, however, assert, that those which they have retained, are *mystical and holy mysteries* †? And if

* The consubstantiation of some reformed Churches seems to me to approach very near to the transubstantiation of the Church of Rome. And, when the Roman catholics teach, that the real body and blood of Christ are taken by those who receive the consecrated elements, at the Holy Communion, and the Church of England informs us, that the body and blood of Christ *are verily and indeed taken by the faithful in the Lord's Supper*, I frankly confess, I do not perceive the difference.

† See the Office of Baptism, and the Exhortation before the Communion Service. Our Church, in the number of her Sacraments, reckons but two out of the seven religious ceremonies which the Church of Rome dignifies with that title; but it is observable, that, in her practice, she hath adopted four of the rejected five, and allows them to have either a mysterious influence, or a mysterious signification. Marriage, she tells the Deity himself, *is an excellent mystery*; the imposition of the bishop's hands, in the forms of Confirmation and Ordination, is, in the first, plainly suggested, and, in the latter, expressly declared to be the *mysterious* means of communicating the Holy Ghost; and the authoritative remission of sins, in the Visitation of the

if the fundamental articles of Faith, and all the essential religious ceremonies of every established Church in Europe are avowedly *mysterious*, is not the Religion they profess, altogether *mystery*? And are they not all therefore, so far as the character of *mystery* is concerned, equally and truly antitypes of this visionary emblem of the Apostate Church of Antichrist? It is by no means wonderful, that the Romanists, who censure and ridicule all attempts to explain this prophetic vision, by applying it to any nominally Christian Church, should entirely disregard this and every other predicted note of the Antichristian Apostacy, and be persuaded that they are perfectly unconcerned in its completion. But, that Protestant divines, who for more than two hundred years have professed to study and apply this prophecy to its proper object, with this notorious character of Antichristianism before their eyes, should still obstinately adhere to the same absurd and blasphemous fables, that are maintained by the Church of Rome, which they declare to be the Church of Antichrist, and defend them, as the Romanists themselves do, under the fatal name

the Sick, could be appointed only upon the supposition of the *mysterious* efficacy of penitential confession, and the performance of the acts of devotion prescribed in that office.

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of *mystery*; that they should give the same ill-omened denomination also to every religious rite, they esteem necessary to salvation, is not to be accounted for, but by the prevailing influence of that *strong delusion*, so long ago predicted by St. Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonians,

Having, already, suggested my sentiments concerning the Creed of all the European Churches, I shall, in this place, only beg the favour of your Lordship to observe, with what strict propriety the *blasphemy* of the Antichristian theology is, in this Prophecy, ascribed to the *civil power*, by which alone it is and could be established and upheld: whilst the pretence of *incomprehensible mystery*, by the superstitious awe of which alone it is or can be defended, is peculiarly attributed to the *Church*. But, because the *mysterious* influence of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, is supposed to be well warranted, in certain passages of Holy Scripture, I will take this opportunity of making a few observations upon the arguments founded in the canonical authority of the Scriptures of the New Testament, in general; and upon the chief of those passages in particular.

The favourite way of arguing, in use with the orthodox, to silence the importunate remon-

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stances of reason and common sense, is as follows :

“ The word of God is always infallibly true,
 “ and must, in all cases, be received for truth,
 “ though its dictates may be above the com-
 “ prehension of our finite understandings. The
 “ canonical books of the New Testament are
 “ all of them, and in every part, the inspired
 “ word of God. Such a doctrine is certainly
 “ taught us, in such and such passages of those
 “ books. Therefore it is our duty to receive
 “ that doctrine for truth, notwithstanding any
 “ difficulties, with which it may seem to us to
 “ be attended.”

The first of these propositions will be universally assented to; but, if either the second or third may be reasonably denied or doubted, the entire force of this argument is evidently destroyed. In order to prove these therefore great stress is laid, both upon the concurrent opinion of a large majority of able and learned divines of many and early ages, and upon the apparent improbability there is, that the wisdom and goodness of God should suffer mankind to be deceived in so important an article, and in such a degree as to receive spurious, fictitious Scriptures for the genuine dictates of his Word. The man, who has never much attended to the

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Prophecies (which, in their very nature, must have a more especial claim to the authority of Divine inspiration, than any other parts of the New Testament can pretend to), may, perhaps, find such sort of reasoning perfectly satisfactory and convincing; but to him, who has observed, that the *spirit of prophecy* hath expressly declared it to be the Will of God, that mankind should fall into so *strong a delusion* as to believe what is fabulous and false, the above-mentioned deception will be so far from seeming improbable, that he must necessarily think it probable in the highest degree: And, when he considers the early and long continued, and almost universal Apostacy of professed Christians from the true religion of Jesus Christ, to the contradictory superstition of Antichrist, so clearly and repeatedly predicted in the same Scriptures, how can he avoid being inclined to regard the received opinions of so many preceding ages rather as the test of error, than as the test of truth? For my own part, my Lord, I have carefully, and, as far as is in my power, impartially examined the nature and weight of all the evidence, hitherto adduced to prove the Divine authority of our present canon of the apostolic Scriptures; and after all, find myself very strongly persuaded, that several of the books of the New Testament

are not the works of the authors, whose name they bear, nor of the age, to which they are usually ascribed; that in some of the best authenticated Scriptures, very material additions and alterations have been made since their first publication; and that there is no reason to suppose every word or sentence of the most genuine to have been immediately dictated by the preternatural inspiration of God. Were we to take for our guide, in the investigation, that plain and obvious principle, called forth to public notice by your Lordship, that *the spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus*, I persuade myself, we should soon trace out the truth, and be enabled, with no very great labour, to separate the wheat of the scriptural canon from the chaff. But I do not mean, on the present occasion, to detain your Lordship with such a discussion at large: I would only request your Lordship's patience, whilst I offer a few remarks upon those particular passages of Scripture, on the authority of which, our own Church hath thought fit to pronounce the rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper to be *sacred mysteries*, and necessary to Christian salvation.

The absolute necessity of Baptism, to the participation of the Gospel-covenant, is deduced from our Lord's positive commands to use it,
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recorded in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark ; and from his conversation with Nicodemus, concerning the being *born of water*, related in the Gospel of St. John. And its *mysterious* influence is inferred, as I apprehend, from that conversation only.

Now with respect to the twelve concluding verses of St. Mark's Gospel, in which the command to baptize is contained, your Lordship well knows, they are not to be found in any of the oldest Greek copies, they are therefore assuredly the addition of some later hand, and for that reason, cannot be of authority, any farther than as they are confirmed by Scriptures of greater authenticity. But this is so far from being the case, in the present instance, that, in the two Gospels of Luke and John, the institution of Baptism is nowhere mentioned ; and in that of St. Matthew, where only the history of it is preserved, the time and place and circumstances, in which the command is expressly said to have been given, not only do not agree with, but are absolutely contradictory to, the account given us of it by St. Mark. If therefore our Lord's formal appointment of the rite of Baptism be credited at all, it must be so upon the single authority of the Gospel attributed to St.

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Matthew. Let us examine then, with your Lordship's leave, what that authority is.

In this enquiry, it is to be observed, that whatever testimony can be of use to us, must be found within the limits of the two or three first centuries; for, if the judgment of the succeeding ages, in the concerns of Religion, had not been so signally precondemned, in the prophecies of the New Testament, as to preclude our safe reliance upon it, it is evident, that they themselves could have no warrant for any part of the sacred canon, but what they received from the tradition of those, who lived next to the Apostolic age. The same observation indeed holds also of the Christians of the third century; so that, in reality, no *external* evidence of the authenticity of any book of the New Testament can justly be deemed satisfactory, which is not fairly derived from the writers of the first or second century: but they and indeed all the early writers who inform us, that St. Matthew wrote a Gospel, assure us also, that he wrote it in *Hebrew*.

Here then, my Lord, a judicious, candid enquirer will naturally ask first, What is become of the original Hebrew copy of St. Matthew's Gospel? and secondly, Whether the Greek copy we now receive as his Gospel, is satisfactorily

proved to be a faithful exact translation of the original Hebrew? And judge what must be his sentiments, when he finds, first, that there is absolutely no *credible* testimony existing, that such an Hebrew Gospel of St. Matthew was ever once seen, from the time when it is supposed to have been written, to the present hour: and secondly, that it is not so much as pretended to be known, where or when or by whom our Greek copy was translated.

The force of this last objection is so obvious and so great, that, in order to evade it, some very eminent modern Divines have thought fit to advance a new hypothesis, concerning St. Matthew's Gospel, *viz.* that it is not a translation from the Hebrew; but was originally written in Greek by St. Matthew himself. The sole foundation of this hypothesis, is laid in certain peculiarities of diction, to which may very justly be added, the great inequality of style, observable in this book, which, I readily agree with those learned critics, cannot well be accounted for, upon the supposition of its being a regular translation from any uniform Hebrew work. And I think I could produce internal evidence equally strong, to shew, that the Greek book, we now call St. Matthew's Gospel, could not be published by any body, till after the publication

cation of St. Luke's, nor earlier than the reign of Trajan, if so early. But the advocates of this modern opinion must be reminded, that the very same arguments, which shall be found of validity sufficient to set aside the testimony of antiquity respecting St. Matthew's writing his Gospel in the Hebrew language and not in Greek, will, at the same time, overthrow all the evidence there is, that St. Matthew wrote a Gospel at all; and there will not remain the least appearance of proof of the authenticity of that Scripture, which, at present goes by his name. Either way therefore, the authority of our Gospel according to St. Matthew, is far too problematical to warrant our receiving any anecdotes it contains, which are not confirmed by better authenticated scriptures; and much more, such as are absolutely contradictory to the Gospel according to St. Luke: yet many parts of it are so, beyond all the power of the most ingenious harmonists to reconcile. I will instance only in that part of the history, which is subsequent to our Lord's Crucifixion; because that includes in it the story of the institution of the rite of baptism.

In St. Luke's history we learn, that the women after they had seen the crucified body entombed, *returned and prepared spices and ointments;*

ments ; and rested the seventh day according to the commandment ; that very early upon the first day of the week, they came with proper assistance to embalm the body, and finding *the stone rolled away from the sepulchre*, they went into it, and were much surprized, that *they found not the body* there ; that they were relieved from their perplexity by a preternatural vision, in the form of two men splendidly adorned, which assured them of their master's resurrection, and reminded them, that it was only the completion of what he himself had predicted to them, when in Galilee ; that our Lord, after having appeared first to Peter, and then to the two disciples at Emmaus, shewed himself to the eleven apostles and the disciples, who were with them, and expressly commanded them not to go from Jerusalem, but to *tarry* there, till they received the promised inspiration ; that they accompanied him as far as Bethany, at the time of his ascension, but (in obedience to his command) *returned to Jerusalem*, and there continued till the feast of Pentecost.

If this account of St. Luke is to be credited, it is certain, that the women knew of no watch set to guard the sepulchre ; that they saw no soldiers terrified to death at an earthquake, and at the miraculous descent of an angel from

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heaven ; that they met not our Lord in their return, nor received any orders to send his disciples into Galilee to see him ; and that the Apostles did not take a most unnecessary journey on foot, of about a hundred miles and back again, in order to see him and receive his instructions upon the top of a Galilean mountain ; but that they saw him that same day, and for forty days together, conversed with him, at and in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem. Yet in direct contradiction to so consistent and good a writer, and so well authenticated an historian, as St. Luke certainly is, the unknown author or translator of what we call St. Matthew's Gospel informs us, that on *the next day that followed the day of preparation*, (a kind of periphrasis for the sabbath, which it appears to me next to impossible that any Jew should use) the chief priests and Pharisees, instead of keeping holy the sabbath-day, as St. Luke tells us the women did, and as was customary with the whole Jewish nation, agreed to violate the divine commandment, in the most public and notorious manner, by assembling before Pilate, to ask a guard for the sepulchre, and going to seal the stone and set the guard ; that, *in the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week*, (a mode of speaking, which evidently demon-

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demonstrates that this writer had not been accustomed to reckon his time after the Jewish manner) two *only* of the women came, (not to anoint the body, as St. Luke assures us they did, for that would have been inconsistent with the story of the guard, but merely) *to see the sepulchre*; that they saw an angel descend amidst a great earthquake, and roll away the stone from the door and set upon it; that the guards quaked and were almost dead with fear, but the angel bid *them* not to be affrighted, and ordered them to go in haste and tell his disciples, that the Lord was risen, (I suppose, before the sepulchre was opened, for no mention is made of their seeing him rise and come forth, after the stone was rolled away) and that they should see him in Galilee, whither he was going before them; that, in their way, Jesus himself met them, and commanded them to tell his disciples to go into Galilee and *there* they should see him; and that the *eleven disciples* accordingly went away into Galilee, to a mountain that had been appointed them, where they saw him and received the positive institution of the rite of baptism.

To reconcile these two jarring histories, much learned labour hath been bestowed in vain by many eminent commentators, and by none more

than by the late Mr. Gilbert West: but as the whole of his groundless, though ingenious and much applauded comment proceeds upon a supposition, that the women and the soldiers were not at the sepulchre at the same time, it is utterly overthrown by a single dissyllable in the original of St. Matthew's history, which unfortunately for his system, and for that of every other harmonist, expressly informs us, that they were both there together; I mean the pronoun *ὑμεῖς*, which in the text is added to *Μη φοβείσθε*, and which can have no other use than to mark to the women the antithesis between themselves and the affrighted soldiers*. And it is curious to observe the strong force of prejudice and prepossession in the artful, uncandid manner, in which Mr. West, when he gives a continued narration of the story according to his own system, passes by so great a difficulty, which it was not in his power to remove, by making the angel speak to the women, not in the words of

* In the Greek and Latin tongues, the two principal pronouns, that is to say, the first and second person, are implied in the very form of the verb itself, and are, for that reason never expressed, unless it be to mark a contradistinction; such as in Virgil,

*Nos patriam fugimus, Tu Tityre, lentus in umbra,
Formosam resonare doces, &c.*

Harris's *Hermes*, B. 1. p. 83. note.

St. Matthew's Gospel, where only the story of the watch is told, *fear not ye*; but in those of St. Mark's history, where no soldiers are mentioned, and where the angel therefore, having no occasion to make use of a contradistinguishing pronoun, says only *be not affrighted* *.

This being the case, my Lord, with the only two passages of Scripture, in which the institution of baptism is recorded, as I find that the first disciples and apostles were not baptized with Christian baptism; that baptism was a customary form of admitting profelytes to a new discipline used, before our Saviour's ministry, not only by John the Baptist, but of old time by the Jewish priests; that, in the Apostolic age, the converts to Christianity were all baptized, not according to the form prescribed in the Gospel attributed to St. Matthew, but simply *into the name of the Lord Jesus* †; and lastly, that St. Paul, who glories ‡, that the Apostolic commission he had received, was as full and ample as that of the greatest of the Apostles, yet declares, that to baptize made no part of *his* commission §; I hope I may be pardoned,

* Observations on the Hist. and Evid. of the Resur. p. 88. ed. 2. † Acts, passim. ‡ 2 Cor. xi. 5, & xii. 11.
See also Gal. c. 1 & 2. § 1 Cor. i. 17.

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If I am not convinced, that our blessed Lord ever positively enjoined the rite of baptism. At the same time I acknowledge, that since he most undoubtedly permitted, and therefore approved the use of it, it appears clearly to behove *us* to imitate his first disciples in the adoption of the same simple, decent and instructive ceremony, whenever we formally admit proselytes to the Christian Faith.

As to the conversation of our blessed Saviour with Nicodemus related in the third chapter of St. John, I am utterly at a loss to know by what rule of interpretation the *being born of water*, there mentioned, is made to signify *being baptized with water*. Your Lordship must recollect some passages of Scripture, where baptism is represented as a figurative burial, but I do not remember one, in which it is called a *birth* in any sense; nor do I see how the same action can, with any degree of propriety, be denominated, even figuratively, both our burial and our birth. Indeed, if our Lord did not speak *literally* of a second birth, throughout this dialogue, he dealt very uncandidly with the Jewish Rabbi, who evidently understood him so to speak even to the last. And he had, surely, very little reason to upbraid him, as a *Master of Israel*, for his ignorance of the mystic influ-

influence of a Christian rite, not instituted at the time of this conversation.

I have frequently considered this passage with that attention, wherewith it is the duty of every public teacher, and indeed of every Christian, to consider those parts of Scripture especially upon which any essential doctrines of our religion are founded: and to me, my Lord, it appears, that the generally received interpretation of our Saviour's discourse to the Jewish ruler hath arisen from a very whimsical mistake, *viz.* that *the being born of water* is the second birth there spoken of, and consequently, that *the being born of water*, and *being born of the spirit* signify both the same thing, and both denote the moral reformation, required of all the converts to Christianity, which by a very common figure of speech is denominated *a regeneration* or *newness of life*. Accordingly, our Church scruples not to affirm, in the exhortation with which she introduces the office of baptism, "that our Saviour Christ saith, none can enter
" into the kingdom of God, except he be re-
" generate and *born anew* of water and of the
" Holy Ghost:" whereas, in truth, our Saviour Christ saith no such thing. He tells Nicodemus, that, *except a man be born again* or a second time, *he cannot see the kingdom of God;*
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and upon the Rabbi's asking him how it were possible for a man a second time to undergo a carnal birth, he explains his meaning by assuring him, that *except a man be* (not *born again* as our Church hath it, but simply) *born of water and of the spirit*, that is, (as I apprehend it) of the spirit as well as of water, *he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

That by the being *born of the spirit* is meant a spiritual second birth, either real or figurative, is universally agreed. The question is, what we are to understand by the being *born of water*? And since no such phrase is to be found in any other part of the New Testament, it seems but reasonable, that before we presume to determine its true signification, we should look back into the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and enquire whether any such way of speaking was customary amongst the Jews; for if so, it was without doubt, readily understood by Nicodemus, though we cannot wonder it should be mistaken by the fathers of the orthodox Church. Now, in the Old Testament, my Lord, we find, that the *being born of water* was a common expression in the Hebrew language, to denote our first or carnal birth. For the natural liquid origin, from whence we spring, is there very frequently denominated by the figurative

rative names of *dew* and *water* ; a wife is called a *fountain* * ; children, *springs and rivers of waters* ; to *drink waters out of thine own cistern* signifies to have children by thine own wife ; and the whole Jewish nation are said to † *have come forth out of*, that is, to have been *born of the waters* of Judah. This being the case, I cannot entertain a doubt, but that the *being born of water*, in this dialogue means, not a second, but our first birth, and is the very same as *being born of the flesh*, because *the water*, the ὕψα ποτα, as Justin Martyr calls it, of our first birth, is derived from fleshly parents. I conclude therefore, that the doctrine here taught Nicodemus, is that peculiar doctrine of the Gospel, “ that man is by his maker designed to
 “ exist, not only in the present world, but in a
 “ better life to come ; and that the great re-
 “ wards of the Christian covenant cannot be
 “ attained during the term of our animal life
 “ in fleshly bodies, but are to be inherited af-
 “ ter death, when we shall *be born again* to a
 “ state of *spiritual* existence, as different from
 “ what we now are, as the nature of those or-
 “ ders of beings above us, whom we call spi-
 “ rits, is from that of men :” in short, that it

* Prov. v. 15, &c.
 Synopsis in locum.

† Isaiah xlviii, 1. Vide Poli

is the very same lesson, which St. Paul teaches us, in the fifteenth chapter of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, " That, after dying to the
 " present life, we shall live again at the *resur-*
 " *rection from the dead*, not in such *animal bo-*
 " *dies* as we now have, but in *spiritual bodies*
 " adapted to the mode of existence, we shall
 " then enjoy, for, that *flesh and blood cannot in-*
 " *herit the kingdom of God.*"

In this sense, there is a perfect congruity between the fifth and sixth verses of this much-perverted Scripture, which is utterly destroyed by the commonly-received interpretation : and we also see clearly why our Lord upbraided this *master of Israel*, for his entire ignorance of this second birth.

When Nicodemus confessed himself convinced, by his mighty works, that our Saviour was a teacher commissioned by God, he, in effect, acknowledged him to be the Messiah, because the Jews had no ground on which to expect any other Prophet endowed with miraculous powers, until the appearance of the promised Messiah. But it is highly probable, that, like the rest of our Lord's disciples, he had overlooked one part of the character given of that distinguished personage by the old Prophets ;
 and

and dazzled with the pompous predictions of his kingdom, had deceived himself into an expectation of his immediate accession to the throne of David, to reign over the whole earth, in temporal power and splendour : and that, with this idea, he came to make his court betimes to the illustrious monarch. Our Lord's discourse therefore is calculated to undeceive him, to check his carnal views and expectations, and teach him to look forward to the better rewards of a future life of spiritual immortality. He accordingly assures him, that neither he himself nor any man could inherit the predicted kingdom of God, in the fleshly body, which is derived from our first, our *watery* birth, but that he must previously undergo *a second birth* to a spiritual life, before he could enter into the kingdom of God. And, as the death and resurrection of the Messiah had been very circumstantially foretold by the Jewish prophets, we cannot wonder, that our Lord upbraided the Rabbi for his inattention to the meaning of those Scriptures which he had undertaken to teach the people, because we know that he upbraided his other disciples for the same thing, after his resurrection, when he fully explained to them the Prophetic Scriptures, and convinced them, that, before the Messiah *could*

enter into his glory *, he must needs have *suffered* death, and *been raised from the dead the third day*.

So far as I am capable of judging therefore, this celebrated conversation between our Saviour and Nicodemus, far from giving any Church reason to teach, that water-baptism is a *sacred mystery*, or a *mystical washing away of sin*, hath not even the most distant reference of any kind to that early-adopted, decent mode of admitting proselytes to the school of Christ.

The other rite, which our Church declares to be a holy mystery, was unquestionably enjoined upon his disciples by our blessed Saviour himself, and ought, therefore, to be universally observed by them. But then, the time, the manner, and the very words, in which the institution was made, are so well known; and it is so expressly declared to be merely commemorative of our Lord's death, that, if we did not know with what infamous servility the Fathers of the orthodox Church imitated the institutions of Pagan superstition, borrowed the very terms and phrases used in the *mysterious* ceremonies of the Heathen, and applied them to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, we should be at a loss to conceive how it could ever have been called a *mystery*. At present, if I mistake not, the

* Luke xxiv, 26—46.

highly

highly figurative answer, which our Saviour, in the sixth chapter of St. John, is recorded to have given to those Jews, who, having followed him for the loaves and fishes, demanded such a miraculous sign of his divine commission as their forefathers had experienced in the wilderness, when bread was given them from Heaven, is made the ground-work of that *internal spiritual grace* and *mysterious efficacy*, which is said to attend the observance of this most simple and unaffected Christian rite. The whole of his discourse on that occasion is supposed to refer to the Communion of bread and wine, of which, at that time, not the Jews only, but even his own disciples, were entirely ignorant. And, accordingly, the communicants are assured by our Church *, in the very words of this chapter, that when they receive the Holy Sacrament, “ they then spiritually *eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his blood.* They then *dwell in Christ, and Christ in them.*” From the same passage of Scripture, understood in the same sense, I mean as alluding to the Lord’s Supper, the Roman Catholics also deduce their strongest arguments in favour of the horrid doctrine of transubstantiation. But after all the ingenuity displayed, both by Protestants and Papists, in support of

* Exhortation before the Communion Service.

this

this interpretation (if it be certain that our Lord really held this discourse) it seems to me impossible he should mean any thing by *the bread which came down from Heaven*, besides that word of God, the Evangelic doctrine, which he was peculiarly commissioned to teach, and which seems to be here called *himself*, and *his flesh and blood*, in the same figure of speech, whereby we speak of the house, when we mean the persons that inhabit it. At least, since the heavenly food, which, in this discourse, he calls *himself* and *his flesh*, is expressly and repeatedly said to have *come down from Heaven*, it is beyond all controversy, that he could not mean either his human body of flesh and blood, as the Romanists teach, or the sacramental emblems of it, the bread and wine, as our Church insinuates, because it is certain, that they are altogether earthly and did not *descend from Heaven*.

So much for *mystery*, which the inspired Prophet informs us, is the first conspicuous character of the Apostate Church. The next is *idolatry* and her title, whereby that particular crime is denoted, is *Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth*.

Upon this circumstance, Bishop Bossuet, in order to vindicate the Church of Rome from the charge, usually urged against her by the
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Protestants, of being the Church of Antichrist, hath founded an objection, which your Lordship allows to be *extremely ingenious*, and, till the publication of your Lordship's elegant Discourses, *unanswered**. The purport of it is this, " That since it was evidently the intention " of this Prophecy to display the crimes of the " Antichristian power it predicts, in the highest " colours, if, by the harlot here spoken of, the " Apostle had meant a corrupted Christian " Church, he would sometimes, at least, have " called her *idolatry* by the name of *adultery*, " and not always by that of *fornication* only, " which is a crime of less complicated guilt. " That, in such a case, he would have denomi- " nated her *Samaria*, a city which polluted a " true Religion with an *idolatrous* form of wor- " ship, and not *Babylon*, a Pagan city, which " never was *in covenant* with God." To this, your Lordship replies †, that the Prophet having chosen to make *Babylon* the type of the Antichristian Church, *the concinnity of the figure and the just correspondence of the thing signified to the sign, demands*, that what could not properly be said of the type, should not be applied to the antitype. And therefore, since the *idolatry* of Pagan Babylon could not properly be termed

* Serm. xi, p. 373.

† Ibid, p. 374.

adultery, she could not, with propriety, be accused of more than *fornication*, even when she was made the type of Christian Rome.

Notwithstanding your Lordship's triumphant boast of having *thus entirely taken off the edge of this acute objection* *, I can scarce persuade myself, that so very able and judicious a critic as your Lordship can be really satisfied with such an argument, and believe it a sufficient answer to the French prelate's objection. I am confident were the Bishop of Meaux now living, he would triumph in his turn, and conclude, that his objection were, indeed, unanswerable. For since, as your Lordship observes, *the principles of decorum*, in figurative writing, require, that there should be *a concinnity of the figure, and a just correspondence of the thing signified to the sign*, it cannot, on any account, be allowed, a mere human writer to adopt a figure, in which the principal features and most material circumstances of the type and antitype are, not only not the same but, very widely different. And I can see no reason for attributing to the dictates of divine inspiration less propriety of expression than is allowable to those of the ordinary faculties of the human mind. If Rome, therefore, be a Church in religious covenant with God

* Serm. xi, p. 378.

through

through Christ, or, to use the figurative language of the Prophets, under a *marriage contract*, Babylon, which never was under such a contract; was, by no means, a proper *sign* whereby to *signify* it; because there is not a *just correspondence* between them. Your Lordship, indeed, hath alledged * one corresponding circumstance as sufficient to justify the Prophet's choice of Babylon to be a type of Rome, even under the Christian covenant, *viz.* that "each, " in its turn, was *the mother of harlots and* " *abominations of the earth*; the former corrupt- " *ing the Heathen world with her fornication,* " and the latter the *Christian.*" But should we allow, what your Lordship is pleased to take for granted, that Rome was indeed the original source of all the corruptions of the Christian world; yet still, since the degree of crime is much less in the *idolatry* of a mere Pagan city, than in that of a city enjoying the supernatural light of a revealed Religion, and lying under the obligations of a special covenant, Mr. De Bossuet would have great reason to repeat, " That if the Apostle had intended to signify " a Christian Church, he ought, on all ac- " counts, to have made *Samaria*, and not *Ba-* " *bylon* the *sign.*" And, in that case, your

* Serm. xi, p. 376.

Lordship might have pointed out a much juster correspondence of the type to the antitype, by observing, that as *Samaria*, under the Mosaic covenant, was the source of all the *idolatrous* corruptions of the Jewish Church; so *Rome*, under the covenant of the Gospel, hath been the origin of *idolatry* in the Church of Christ. But even this single resemblance, produced by your Lordship, between *Babylon* and *Rome*, imperfect as it is, is not founded in fact; for, as I have before suggested to your Lordship, it is notorious, that every species of *idolatry*, of which the Church of Rome can be accused, did not originate in her, but was derived from Antioch and Alexandria.

It is curious to observe, that, in this argument between your Lordship and the Bishop of Meaux, as between all Protestant and Papist writers upon the same subject, it is supposed, on both sides, that the Church of *Rome* is really a true Church of *Christ*, and, that the fundamental articles of her Religion are the fundamental articles of the Christian covenant. On the part of the Papists indeed it cannot be otherwise. And when we compare the fundamental religious articles of every established Church in Christendom with those of the Church of *Rome*, we cannot wonder, that the
same

same *principle* should be assumed by them also : for should the Religion of the Church of *Rome* turn out, at last, to be repugnant to the covenant of the Gospel, every orthodox Church in Europe would have cause to tremble at the consequences. But, whilst it concerns the Protestant Churches so deeply, that the Church of Rome should not be condemned too far, it must surely make every impartial by-stander smile, to see divines of your Lordship's learning and abilities define *Antichrist* to be a power, that * *maintains a direct enmity and opposition to Christ*, and write professedly to demonstrate, that the Roman-catholic Church is the Church of *Antichrist*, and yet, at the same time, allow her to be a true Church of *Christ*. Surely, my Lord, the same Church can no more be both *Christian* and *Antichristian*, at the same time, than light and darkness can exist together, or than *Christ* and *Antichrist* can be the same person. The true and only answer to Mr. De Bossuet's objection is, that the Church which is professedly the object of this Prophecy is no more a *Christian* Church than Pagan *Babylon* herself; her Religion, instead of being agreeable to the *truth and soberness* of the Gospel covenant, is *fabulous, false, blasphemous and idolatrous*; for this very reason, in-

* Sermon. vii, p. 215, &c.

stead of being described as wedded to *Christ*, she is represented as the common *prostitute* of the princes of the Roman Empire, depending on them alone for her establishment, her authority, and her subsistence : and because, during that spiritual tyranny, which, it is predicted, her royal paramours would assume and exercise in her behalf, the true Religion of Jesus Christ would no where find toleration, we are taught by the inspired Prophet, that, so long as that impious usurpation shall last, there will be no Church in *marriage contract with Christ*, but that when the predicted period shall arrive, at which the same powers, that established it, shall abolish the *Antichristian* apostacy, then, and not till then *, *the marriage of the Lamb* will take place, and *his wife* shall have *made herself ready*,

There is another mistake observable also, in the arguments both of Papists and Protestants about this Prophecy, viz. that the city *Babylon* is a prophetic *sign* intended to signify some particular city of modern times. But, as I have before remarked, the figurative terms *Babylon the Great*, or *that great city, the harlot of the kings of the earth*, are manifestly opposed to those of *Jerusalem, the holy city*, or *the New Jerusalem, the Spouse of Christ*. And therefore, since the latter

* Rev. xix, 7.

type cannot denote any one particular city, but must necessarily include in its signification every society of true Christians, who embrace and practise the pure Religion of the Gospel, and acknowledge no Lord nor Lawgiver in religious concerns but Jesus Christ; so the former cannot be confined to any one church or city, but must needs extend to every society in every nation, by whatsoever denomination they may call themselves, who adopt the *Antichristian*, or, which I take to be perfectly synonymous, the *orthodox* superstition, which *temporal* power alone hath established, and alone continues to uphold. In this sense, my Lord, there is, indeed, in many particulars, a very *just* and striking *correspondence* between *the thing signified*, and *the sign*. For, as *Babylon* was the source of ancient, so hath the *orthodox Church* been of modern *idolatry*. As *Babylon* first aimed at universal empire, and enslaved the nations around it; so the *orthodox Church* first attempted to establish an universal empire over conscience, and enslaved the minds of men. As the despot of *Babylon* decreed, that all who would not worship the image he had thought fit to erect, should be destroyed in the *burning fiery furnace*, so the princes of the *orthodox Church* condemned those, who refused to conform to the *idolatry* they had established

blished to perish at the *fiery stake* ; whilst the Church herself, not satiated with such diabolical vengeance, hath impiously presumed to anticipate the final judgment of Heaven, and doomed them in the next world, to suffer everlasting burning. As Babylon desolated and laid waste Jerusalem, led captive the people of Israel, and compelled them to violate the principles of the Law of Moses, and publickly to offer sacrifice to Pagan idols ; so *the Orthodox Church* hath ruined and enthralled the *Church of Christ*, and compelled the professors of Christianity to contradict the very spirit and first principles of the Gospel, and openly to embrace her *Catholic faith*, and *idolatrous* mode of worship. Lastly, as the Assyrian metropolis projected the impracticable scheme of an universal union of mankind, and erected a common center of unity for that purpose, which ended in the disunion and entire separation of the people from each other, by *the confusion of tongues* ; so the *Orthodox Church*, wheresoever it hath been established, hath erected a common standard of religious belief, and wildly and vainly endeavoured to accomplish an universal agreement of opinion and uniformity of doctrine, and the attempt hath ended in the division and subdivision of Christendom, into a very *Babel* of contending

tending heresies and differing modes of *fanaticism and superstition*.

But whether *Babylon* be supposed to signify the *Orthodox Church* in general, or only one branch of it in particular, it is equally necessary, if we would understand the meaning of this prophecy, to enquire what that crime of *Idolatry* is, of which the *Antichristian Church* stands repeatedly preindicted by the inspired apostle. And there is the greater need of this, because your Lordship and other eminent commentators have been pleased to teach us *, that the nature of *Idolatry*, since the promulgation of the Gospel, is not the same it was before, but, that the *Idolatry* peculiar to the *Christian Covenant*, and consequently that which is intended in this prophecy, is the crime of having other *mediators* between God and man, besides the true and only mediator Jesus Christ.

That such a Polymestism, indeed, is an offence against the religion of the Gospel is unquestionable; because St. Paul assures us, that in the Christian Covenant there is but † *one mediator, the man Christ Jesus*. But if your Lordship could produce sufficient warrant either from reason or from the sacred Scriptures to convince us, that the crimes of Polymestism

* Serm. xi. p. 383.

† 1. Tim. ii, 5.

and

and Polytheism are equally heinous, (which, I will venture to affirm, is far from being in your Lordship's power), it would only follow, that one more is added to the catalogue of crimes under the Christian than under the Mosaic dispensation. The new crime could not, with any reason or propriety, be called by the name of an old one of a very different nature: much less could it be supposed entirely to annul the old crime, supplant it and assume its place. Whenever therefore I find the preachers of the New Testament denouncing the vengeance of Heaven against *adultery, idolatry, murder, &c.* knowing the perfect immutability of the divine will, I apprehend every one of those names to signify the very same vicious actions, that they were used to denote, under the first covenant; and consequently conclude, that *idolatry*, in particular, is not a new species of crime, that never existed till about 300 years after Christ, but the very same impiety, which is so frequently mentioned by that name in the Old Testament, and which is so accurately defined, and so solemnly prohibited in the two first commandments of the Decalogue.

Here, by the way, my Lord, I must take the liberty to point out a most essential defect in the only argument, that I have ever seen or heard
alledged

alleged to vindicate our own national church from that charge of idolatry, which hath of late been urged against her, for worshipping, as the one eternal God, a Being whom she herself avows to be a man. The argument is this, "The Scriptures of the New Testament, being the inspired word of God, are our only rule of belief and practice in the concerns of religion. In some passages of those Scriptures, this *Man* is called *God*; in others, the incommunicable attributes of the Deity are ascribed to him, not in a figurative or secondary," (as many good and learned men in all ages have believed) "but in a primary and literal sense. However incomprehensible therefore such a mysterious union of the two natures may be to us, since the Holy Scriptures expressly teach us, that this *Man* is also the only true *God*, it is so far from criminal in us, that it is our indispensable duty to acknowledge and worship him as such."

All those, (and a very numerous body they are) whose indolent indifference, whose habitual prejudices, or whose personal interests incline them to wish the established mode of worship right, may perhaps be thoroughly satisfied with this way of reasoning, according to that most just maxim *facile credimus quod volumus*.

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But

But a mind divested of partiality and prepossession, my Lord, will be apt to carry the question much higher. It will observe, that though the Gospel be a revelation of the Divine will, yet it is not the first revelation which God hath vouchsafed to make; that, since the eternal Deity is altogether immutable both in nature and in will, he cannot contradict himself; and consequently, it is impossible, that any genuine, subsequent revelation should make that a virtue and a religious duty, which a prior revelation hath prohibited as an heinous sin, and declared to be a blasphemous impiety. The first and most important question therefore in this controversy is, whether the worshipping a *Man* as *God*, or the one Almighty *God* as having the nature and bodily form of a *man*, be the crime prohibited, under the Mosaic covenant by the name of *idolatry*? For if it be, it must remain a crime to all eternity: and had the first preachers of the Gospel really enjoined it, it would have been our duty to have renounced and abominated their doctrine, upon the very same principle, on which St. Paul directs the Galatians to regard as accursed every doctrine which contradicted the Gospel that had been first preached to them, though it should be taught them by the Apostles themselves,

selves, or even by *an angel from heaven**. . If therefore the doctrine of *the incarnation of God* be really taught in any Scriptures of the New Testament, and the worshipping the unchangeable Deity agreeably to that doctrine, be *idolatry* according to the Old Testament, those Scriptures are so far from affording us sufficient warrant for admitting such a doctrine, that there doctrine itself affords the strongest reason that can be, for our rejecting every Scripture that teacheth it, as most assuredly spurious and false.

Let us consider then how the case stood under the Law of Moses. We there find *idolatry* so repeatedly prohibited, so signally and severely punished, and so continually represented as a most heinous sin, that the great end of the divine dispensation under the Old Testament seems to have been, to eradicate from the Jewish people all propensity to an idolatrous worship of the eternal Deity, and by their means to establish amongst mankind just and worthy ideas of the invisible, omnipresent author and preserver of their existence. Accordingly, (as the counsels of omnipotence must ever do) it is well known to have actually produced the effect intended; for, from the Babylonish captivity to the present hour, the Jews have not only

* Gal. i, 8.

shewn no inclination to, but constantly manifested the utmost abhorrence from *idolatry* of every kind.

To understand the true nature of that impious crime, which is denominated idolatry in the Old Testament, we need only attend to the two first precepts of the Decalogue, which we, as well as the Jews, acknowledge to be the Law of God.

The first of these prohibits *Polytheism*. Now the Polytheist, in order to distinguish his variety of Deities from each other, must necessarily conceive them to be of different natures, attributes and forms. The objects of his adoration therefore, instead of being infinite and incomprehensible, are discernable and distinguishable by the faculties of his mind: and, with the statuary's or the painter's help, he is able to exhibit a visible representation of the several Gods he worships. Consequently, whether the artist's aid be called in or not, every polytheist must needs be an *idolater*. The first species of *idolatry* then, and that which, together with polytheism, is solemnly forbidden in the first commandment, consists in worshipping any thing whatsoever as God, besides the one incorporeal, uncompounded, infinite Being, by whom this Law was given, whether it be a thing
actually

actually created, or the mere creature of our own imagination. If, therefore, the Catholic Orthodox Church worshippeth a compound God; if she worshipeth an human, and consequently a created being as the true *God*; if she personifies, and makes a distinct object of adoration of the extraordinary influence of the Divine power over the affairs of men (and that she doth the two first of these, at least, cannot be denied); she is guilty of the *idolatry* prohibited by this Commandment, and so far answers the description given of the Antichristian Church in the prophetic Vision of St. John.

But though polytheism necessarily implies *idolatry*, yet it is certain that *idolatry* may subsist without polytheism; for a man, who acknowledges and worships only one God, may think of that God so unworthily as to imagine him embodied in a material frame, and cloathed with the nature and passions of a created being. The object of every such person's worship is, in his own idea, evidently an *idol*; and he wants only the skill of the artist to produce a sensible delineation of the peculiar form and features, or to erect an image of the deity he adores. To worship the one true God, therefore, under any bodily form whatever is another species of *idolatry*, made highly criminal by the Mosaic revelation,
repeatedly

repeatedly said to be *blaspheming* him; and which on account of its injurious derogation from the nature and attributes of the Almighty, and of its pernicious influence upon the religious tenets and consequently upon the minds and morals of mankind, is, in the second Commandment, represented as more especially displeasing to our Creator, and prohibited with denunciation of a peculiar vengeance against it. Of this kind of *idolatry* also, offensive as it is declared to be to Heaven, the whole orthodox Church is unquestionably guilty, for she *avowedly* worships the one true *God* as incarnate in the body of a *man*. The members of the Church of Rome make no scruple of using sensible representations of this incarnate object of their adoration: and your Lordship hath suggested *, that, possibly, their Church may, on that account, deserve the charge of *idolatry* alledged, in this Prophecy, against the Church of Antichrist. However, with a prudent caution, observable in more than one passage of your Lordship's highly polished discourses, you decline insisting upon that circumstance; although, if we except the above-mentioned transgression of the first Commandment, it is the only *idolatry*, properly so called, of which she is or can be

* Serm. xi, p. 383.

guilty.

guilty. For since the crime of *idolatry* manifestly consists either in worshiping as God something which is not *God*, or in worshiping the true God under a bodily form; with respect to the petitions, which the Church of Rome offers, to deceased saints and martyrs, if she adores them as a kind of tutelar, though inferior *deities* (as the Monkish divines of Africa, in the fourth century, from whom she received the practice, most certainly did,) she then, indeed, is guilty of a greater degree of *polytheistic idolatry* than the Protestants can be charged with; but if, as she herself declares, she really applies to them not as *gods*, but merely as *mediators* between God and men, whatever offence she may commit against the one mediator of the Christian Covenant, whatever folly it may be to address herself to those, who, as far as she hath any just reason to think, are incapable of hearing her, she is not, on that account, guilty of the sin prohibited under the name of *idolatry*. But your Lordship, no doubt, foresaw, that a direct accusation of worshiping the true God under a bodily form, brought against the Church of Rome, would assuredly draw after it a similar charge against other orthodox Churches: for when the Protestants invoke the one almighty Lord of Heaven and earth by his *nativity and*

circumcision, his agony and bloody sweat, his cross and passion, his death and burial, they represent to us the bodily form of their Deity as plainly as if they placed a crucifix before our eyes. And, accordingly, your Lordship well knows, they are not the churches and books of devotion of Roman-catholics only, in which images and pictures are to be found of the Human-Deity, or the God-Man, as the Orthodox affect to call him, whom both Papists and Protestants adore as the only true God.

But there is no need of demonstrating the *idolatry* of every orthodox Church. Your Lordship frankly and publicly avows it, and informs us, that one instance of God's goodness and gracious indulgence to mankind, under the Gospel dispensation, and the very end of his previous incarnation, was the gratifying the world with that *idolatrous* mode of worship, to which they were so prone, without imputing it to them as a crime. I say your Lordship does this, because the *scriptural confutation* of Mr. Lindsay's arguments, being honoured with your Lordship's applause and recommendation, may very fairly be supposed to speak your Lordship's sentiments on this occasion : and, in that, Mr. Burgh (with less sagacious wariness, perhaps, than a more aged and experienced champion

pion of the same cause would have shewn) hath plainly told us *, that God “took manhood on
 “ him, in order to give a *sensible object of wor-*
 “ *ship* to mankind, incapable of forming any
 “ adequate idea of the abstract God, whose
 “ qualities are of a nature incomprehensible by
 “ our minds. The world, merged in idolatry
 “ (continues this orthodox writer) at the time
 “ of his incarnation, was mercifully indulged
 “ with an *object of sense*, to which men could
 “ look *according to habit* also, as well as the
 “ natural incapacity to conceive a God only
 “ spiritual, and to whom, *even by the exertion of*
 “ *the same faculties by which they had adopted and*
 “ *adored idols*, they could prefer worship, with-
 “ out the imputation of idolatry.”

I will do this young and spirited defender of the Catholic Faith the justice to acknowledge, that he entertains ideas perfectly conformable to the principles he has espoused, and that I am fully satisfied no better argument can be offered, in support of the received theology, than that which he hath here adduced. But, at the same time, when I consider, that, according to this representation of things, mankind are *incapable of conceiving a God only spiritual*, though the Jews, from their Babylonish captivity, the Pagan philo-

* Script. Conf. p. 150, Ed. 1.

fophers, at all times, amongst the ancients, the Mahomedans, for the most part, from the days of Mahomed, and the very numerous body of modern European Deists, are all incontestable proofs to the contrary; that, under the law of Moses, an omniscient and omnipotent Being was endeavouring to accomplish an impracticable end, and under the Gospel gave up the very point he before aimed at, on account of that human *incapacity* of which he himself was the author; *that* the eternal, immutable Deity, who *is* always *the same**, who *never alters the decree he hath once pronounced*, with whom *is no variableness, neither shadow of turning*, hath undergone the greatest change, of which any spiritual being is capable, on purpose to justify and establish, at one period, the very same mode of worship which he had most solemnly prohibited at another; and lastly, that, with a caprice and fickleness of mind, unbecoming the weakest of his frail creatures, after having, for many generations, severely punished the forefathers of the Jewish people, under the old Covenant, for worshipping him under a *bodily form*, he, under the new, inflicts his vengeance upon their posterity, for refusing to transgress his own Commandment, and worship him under the form

* Psalm cii, 27. Ibid. lxxxix, 34. James i, 17.

of a *man*; when I consider this, my Lord, I say, the falshood, the absurdity, the *blasphemy*, both of the system and its defence, appear so glaring, that I am shocked and astonished to find either of them patronized and abetted by men, especially of your Lordship's character, who acknowledge the authenticity of both the revelations, and profess to be ministers of the Gospel of Christ.

In speaking of the Bishop of Meaux's objection to the usual Protestant interpretation of this Prophecy, I have above suggested what I believe to be the true reason why the *idolatry* of the Apostate Church is never once called spiritual adultery, though it was unquestionably the Prophet's intent to paint her crimes in the highest colouring. But it is well worth our observation, that, although, in this seventeenth chapter, she is only called *the mother of harlots* and of *abominations* in general, yet, in the former part of this series of prophetic visions, she is accused of *spiritual sodomy**. Now fornication and adultery, my Lord, though criminal, are such crimes as men may easily fall into through the instigation of their natural appetites, if they be not carefully kept within the bounds of duty and reasonable restraint; but the vice of *Sodom*

* Rev. xi, 8.

cannot be accounted for upon the principle of natural desire; it is a pollution altogether contrary to nature, and must ever be odious and disgusting to those whose morals are not depraved and vitiated in a very high degree. In like manner, the adoration of the sun, moon and stars, amongst people ignorant of astronomy, seems an easy consequence from a natural admiration of those splendid orbs, joined to an experience of their great utility and influence over the earth. The worship, also, of deceased heroes, and the distinguished benefactors of mankind, was produced, no doubt, by an excessive love of their persons, and veneration for their memories, accompanied with a strong persuasion of their existence after death. And thus almost every instance of Pagan idolatry may be accounted for from the immoderate prevalence of some of those passions, which are inherent in human nature. But whether the worshipping three different agents, as three distinct objects of adoration and discourse, and yet as constituting but one God; whether the worshipping a Divinity, who is himself his own *father* and his own *son*, his own *sender* and his own *messenger*; whether the worshipping the *immutable* and *immortal* Godhead, as having *changed* the mode of his existence, and compounded himself with the frail and

and mortal nature of man on purpose that he might *die*; whether this, my Lord, be not a species of *idolatry* unknown in ancient times, unaccountably monstrous and irrational, and repugnant to every *natural* faculty of an unprejudiced mind, I leave to your Lordship, and every other patron of the orthodox theology, seriously and candidly to consider.

Having mentioned the eleventh chapter of this Apocalypse, I cannot forbear remarking to your Lordship, that, in that part of the prophetic vision, the Apostate Church is represented as divided into an equal number of parts with the civil power of that empire by which she is established. And we are told, that the abolition of the Antichristian superstition will first take place in one *tenth part**, that is, in one of the European states alone; and that, at some distance of time afterwards, it will be every where accomplished. But your Lordship knows, that the religious change which took place at the separation of the Protestants from the Church of Rome, instead of being confined to one, was effected in many different states nearly at the same time; so that what we fondly call by that name, cannot be the important *Reformation* here predicted, and which is

* Rev. xi, 13.

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* Rev. xi, 13.

absolutely necessary to the completion of this prophecy.

I have now, my Lord, in as concise a manner as I could, submitted to your Lordship and my fellow-citizens at large, the remarks I had to offer relative to the important questions proposed in the first page of this letter. What impression they may make upon your Lordship or any other person, I cannot pretend to judge. But such a comparison of our theological tenets with the spirit and letter of the Old Testament, and with the prophecies of the New, strikes my mind with the clearest conviction of which it is capable. To bring the whole into one point of view, the case appears to me to stand thus :

Both in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures an appeal is made to the completion of predicted events *, as the only infallible criterion between a real and a pretended revelation; and we are, in an especial manner, referred to the *spirit of prophecy*, as the *testimony of Jesus* †. From hence it necessarily follows, that either those predictions of the Gospel, which ought to have occurred before the present date of the Christian æra, must have really come to pass,

* Besides Deut. xviii. above cited, see Isaiah xli. 22, 23. xlii. 8, 9. xliv. 7, 8.

† Rev. xix, 10.

or else the Gospel itself is false. The grand object of those prophecies is a Catholic apostacy from the true and rational religion of Jesus Christ to a *mysterious, blasphemous, idolatrous superstition*, under the delusive influence of which the people would *turn away their ears from the truth, and reject sound doctrine*, and adopt *fables and falsehood* in its room. Such a Religion must needs be fundamentally and totally erroneous. Since therefore every established church in Christendom, from the fourth century to our own times, hath been built upon one and the same *orthodox* foundation, and hath adopted the very same primary essential articles of religious doctrine and belief, either they have all apostatized from the true Christian faith, according to the tenor of these prophecies, or no such apostacy hath happened. In other words, EITHER THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION IS NOT TRUE, OR THE RELIGION OF EVERY ORTHODOX CHURCH IN EUROPE IS FABULOUS AND FALSE.

Under this conviction, my Lord, had I imagined that the members of the legislature in general, and your Lordship's sacred order in particular, had duly attended to these circumstances, and still determined to maintain the established system of theology, I should have

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thought

thought myself bound in conscience immediately to relinquish my sacerdotal office, and withdraw myself from the national church. But I persuade myself that neither the prophecies of the Gospel, nor the fundamental articles of the legal creeds have yet been attentively considered in the light in which I have here endeavoured to place them. And it seems to me the duty of every man, who thinks he perceives important errors and abuses in the religious society of which he is a member, first to use his best endeavours to have them reformed and rectified ; and, if *they* prove ineffectual, then to renounce the fellowship of every such erroneous Church.

In consequence of this persuasion, I have troubled your Lordship with this publication, which would have appeared much sooner, if I had not found it necessary to await the long-protracted issue of an appeal, made in the course of a tedious prosecution commenced against me, in the ecclesiastical courts *, partly through the
intem-

* In proof of the real decay of the illiberal spirit of Antichristianism amongst us, as well as in justice (and, on my part, gratitude) to the parishioners of Tewkesbury, it ought to be observed, that the prosecution here mentioned was approved and encouraged only by a small party, whilst the majority, upon the first notice of it, to their lasting honour, formally declared their detestation of it in
the

intemperate zeal of that intolerant bigotry and narrow-minded superstition, which hath been the chief subject of the preceding pages, but much, more through the malicious rage of offended arrogance and overbearing pride.

Had the cause of Christianity against Anti-christianism been pleaded, upon these very grounds, by an advocate of your Lordship's talents and distinction, much might have been expected. But I am thoroughly sensible how little probable it is, that arguments, urged by so insignificant an individual as myself, however reasonable and well founded, should have any considerable influence, when opposed to the general, inveterate prejudices of so many ages, combined with the particular, *temporal* interests of a very powerful body of men. I have now, however, done all that is in my power towards that necessary reformation in our religion, which, I am confident, must, ere long, take place, notwithstanding all the opposition of the Hierarchy, and of so large a majority of the clergy; and have so

the public prints; and, with a most disinterested generosity and truly Christian-like benevolence, voluntarily raised amongst themselves a very large sum, to defray the charges attending my defence.

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far

far satisfied my conscience in the discharge of what I believe to be my duty upon this occasion, as a member of the established church, a good citizen of my country, and a sincere disciple of Jesus Christ. My next step shall be, and that speedily (unless, beyond my expectation, the disposition of the legislature towards this *important* business should be greatly altered), to demonstrate, that, whilst I have so closely attended to the meaning of other parts of the prophetic vision of St. John, I have not been regardless of that pathetic, heavenly admonition *, which, in your Lordship's opinion†, made it the duty of the Protestants to separate from the communion of the church of Rome.

In

* Rev. xviii. 4, 5.

† Serm. xii, p. 416. Your Lordship, however, is of opinion, that the latter part of this same admonition is merely prophetic of a future event, and not injunctive of any duty upon the true disciples of Jesus Christ. I am sorry to differ on so many occasions from so great and deservedly-admired a critic; but the Papists seem to me to reason very justly when they conclude, that, if the words *Come out of her my people, &c.* lay Christians under an obligation to separate from the apostate church, the words *reward her as she hath rewarded you, &c.* lay them under an equal obligation, as far as is in their power, to endeavour her extirpation. At the same time it is evidently

In the mean time, I would willingly guard against one species of censure, which I think it not unlikely these pages may excite against me, and which I should be very sorry to be thought to deserve.

In religious controversies, it hath been so long the custom to predetermine the sentence of the last day, and in the genuine, uncharitable, contracted spirit of Antichristianism, to condemn all, who differ from ourselves in opinion, to suffer eternal torments in the world

dently impossible that they, who are really actuated by the spirit of that amiable religion, which breathes nothing but benevolence and love towards all mankind, should be guilty of revenge, or treat any of their erring fellow-creatures with that unfeeling cruelty and inhuman hardness of heart, with which the intolerant zeal of Antichristianism hath, at all times, inspired its bigotted votaries. But it is by no means requisite that similar ends should always be effected by similar means. The utter destruction of the Antichristian church; and the offering personal violence to any of its members, are very distinct things; and the latter is far from being, in the least degree, necessarily implied in the former; for, as Montesquieu hath well observed, “ De ce que la société
 “ seroit anéantie, il ne s’ensuivroit pas que les hommes
 “ qui la forment dussent aussi être anéantis. La société
 “ est l’union des hommes & non pas les hommes; le
 “ citoyen” (*of Babylon, for instance*) “ peut périr &
 “ l’homme rester.”

Esprit de Loix; l. 10, c. 3.

to come; declaring that they *cannot be saved*, and must, *without doubt, perish everlastingly*; that, when I attempt to prove the religious doctrines established amongst us by law to be *blasphemy*, and the orthodox mode of worshipping God to be *idolatry*, I may, perhaps, be supposed to accuse the several members of our legislature, and every individual professor of the *Catholic belief*, of the guilt of those heinous sins; and to insinuate, that, at the day of judgement, they will be condemned to endure everlasting punishment as *idolaters* and *blasphemers*. But, though the opinions of men cannot alter the nature of things, nor prevent the many pernicious effects, which a false religion and superstitious notions of the Deity must ever have upon the minds and morals of the generality of the people, yet I am sensible how indispensably requisite an evil intention is to constitute crime: and I know, by experience, that, where *the most blasphemous idolatry* is once adopted and made familiar by habit, it may be practised by good men with the sincerest piety and the best intentions in the world.

The religion of Jesus Christ teacheth me, that the same God, who *winked at* idolatry in the
times

times of pagan ignorance, will make the like merciful allowances for the influence of that unhappy *delusion*, which he predicted by his prophets, and through which (no doubt for wise and good reasons) he hath thought fit to suffer his creatures to be so long deceived. And my hope is, to participate the blessings of a future state of existence together with your Lordship and every other virtuous and amiable man, not only of every religious persuasion, but even of none at all. For I cannot help concluding that the benevolent Father and merciful Judge of all men will be, at least, as indulgent to those Deists, who, making a free and candid use of the rational faculties with which he hath endowed them, refuse their assent where their mind is unconvinced, and reject the truth of divine revelation, which is shewn them only through the medium of error; as to the professors of the *Antichristian* faith, who, led on by habit, in direct contradiction to their reason, embrace ERROR instead of TRUTH.

I am, my Lord,

With much unfeigned respect,

Your Lordship's *obliged*

And very humble servant,

EDWARD EVANSON.

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...allowance for the influence of
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under the truth of revelation, which
is shown them only in the Christian
...as to the first part of the
...habits, in direct contra-
...embarrassed or inflamed



of your
I am, my friend,
With much affection,
Your obedient servant,
J. W. B. EVANS





